



Assessment Guide

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Introduction

This booklet provides guidance on your assessed work for A363. The six tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and the end-of-module assessment (EMA) can be found under ‘Assessment resources’ on the module website. You should read this booklet in conjunction with them.

This booklet explains the assessment strategy for the module and addresses questions that are likely to arise as you approach your assessed work. You should make time to read this booklet in full before embarking on the first TMA, and to check the relevant sections again as you tackle each new assignment. You will find invaluable help here with the different kinds of writing task you will encounter on your journey through the module, as well as with understanding what’s required for the EMA.

You should also make sure that you are familiar with the ‘Assessment information for Arts modules’ and the Assessment Handbook, both of which can be found under ‘Assessment resources’ on the module website.

Assessment strategy

The assessment of A363 consists of two components: the continuous assessment component, consisting of six TMAs, and an examinable component, the EMA. Your final result will depend on your achievements in each component independently. To be sure of a pass you will need to score at least 40 per cent overall in the TMAs and, separately, at least 40 per cent in the EMA. The grade of pass will be determined as described in the Assessment Handbook, available within the ‘Assessment resources’ section of the A363 website.

It is important to note that, to be sure of being awarded a particular grade, both your final overall scores must fall within the specified boundaries for that grade.

The general rules on resubmissions, in cases where the EMA grade falls below the 40 per cent threshold, are also described in the Assessment Handbook.

The purpose of assessment

A363 has six TMAs. One TMA comes at the end of each of the first three parts of the module (TMAs 01, 02 and 05); one is based on forum activity (TMA 03); and two contribute to the development of your EMA project (TMAs 04 and 06). Each TMA is described in full in the ‘Assessment resources’ section of the A363 website. Substitution is not permitted for any of the TMAs. **Two of the TMAs are compulsory (TMAs 04 and 06) and you will not be able to pass without submitting these.** Therefore, it is very important to alert your tutor if unexpected circumstances, for example illness or a serious family crisis, disrupt your ability to complete either of them. Please refer to the Assessment Handbook for details of the appropriate documentation to submit for ‘special circumstances’ to be taken into consideration.

The comments and marks you get back from your tutor for your TMAs have two functions. The one that tends to be uppermost in most students’ minds is that they are a measure of your performance and contribute to your final mark. But the second function is just as important: they should continue to help you to expand and refine your writing skills. Great importance is attached to the process of drafting, revising and improving work in response to feedback.

We hope that, in preparing and writing each assignment, you might teach yourself something – you may, for example, realise that you are not sure of an area or a method and go back over it before writing the assignment. In turn, tutors will use their comments to point out both the strengths and flaws in your writing and how better to tackle future assignments.

A363 gives you the opportunity to try your hand at several ways of writing: fiction, poetry, life writing, film, radio and stage plays. While each of these forms has its specific techniques and approaches, the practice of each one feeds into the others. For example, if you decide that poetry isn’t ultimately for you, the experience of finding analogies, seeking economy of expression

or paying attention to rhythm will still feed into and enhance your prose writing. Similarly, if you decide that film isn't a form you want to pursue, your practice of fiction writing will still benefit from trying some of the methods used in film writing, such as juxtaposition and concise scene-making. This interplay between the genres is often explicit in the chapters of the A363 Handbook. Your own experimentation and practice can take such interplay even further.

The TMAs assess you on a range of genres, and on how effectively you are writing in a particular form at any one time. They assess your editing and drafting skills and evaluate how your writing practice has gained and developed from exposure to the range of forms taught on the module.

Your EMA project will be a substantial piece of work in one of the taught genres. This will be an opportunity for you to show how your style has developed and how some of the different genres you have encountered on A363 have influenced your writing. The EMA assesses your ability to produce a substantial piece of work in one genre, but it also evaluates your development as a writer. Full details of the EMA can be found under 'Assessment resources' on the module website. Please read the information as soon as possible as you will need to focus on planning and preparing your EMA from an early stage in your studies. You will see that TMA 04 and TMA 06 (the compulsory TMAs mentioned above) are formative assignments which contribute to your EMA project.

Tutor advice

It is important to remember that tutors work on a part-time basis for the OU and they cannot give extensive individual advice about TMAs in preparation. **Your tutor cannot vet or give feedback on full-length drafts of TMAs or your EMA prior to submission.** You should be aware that tutors will only be able to comment on about 10 percent of a TMA in progress. They will not read or comment on whole submissions, and it is not their role to proofread your work.

There are several ways in which tutors can help your development. The feedback they provide on your TMAs will indicate areas you could improve on to enhance future submissions. Students are encouraged to give each other feedback in the Part 1, 2, and 3 Handbook Activities forums, or the TMA/EMA work-in-progress forums. Tutors support your developing work through online and face-to-face tutorials in which they will lead practice in the techniques taught in the module. If you come up with good subjects or ideas during any of these sessions, you may develop them for a TMA or for your EMA. During the tutorials your tutor may sometimes be able to cast an eye over material you plan to include in a TMA or the EMA. But this will not always be the case; it will vary according to how individual tutors run their tutorials.

Tutors will offer formal feedback on your EMA project in TMA 04 and TMA 06, as it progresses through its formative stages. Your tutor will then be available during the period of independent study if you have problems. But during this latter period, he or she will only engage in focused consultations about brief passages, scenes or stanzas, or more general

discussion about structure and form that do not involve looking at draft material. Your tutor will not review drafts of your complete EMA project.

Learning outcomes

By the end of your study of A363 you should be able to:

- write fiction, poetry, life writing and drama with a mature and sophisticated style and a greater awareness of elements such as repetition and analogy;
- understand more fully the possible relationships between fiction, drama, life writing and poetry;
- carry out background research for your writing;
- empathise with characters and fully imagine and realise different eras and imaginative worlds in creating new work;
- understand how dramatic writing methods might be transferable to other genres, for instance, to improve and develop prose style and voice;
- demonstrate knowledge of dramatic writing, including knowledge of conventional layout for at least one medium;
- demonstrate knowledge of the strengths and limitations of writing for different dramatic media, and the requirements of writing dramatic adaptations of fiction or lifewriting;
- write with a greater awareness of formal constraints;
- exercise a disciplined practice including willingness to revise and redraft;
- present manuscripts and media scripts to a professional standard;
- give objective evaluations of your own and others' work through constructive criticism;
- produce a piece of writing of substantial length which in its style, complexity and editorial awareness is drafted and redrafted to a high standard;
- reflect on pieces of creative writing in interdisciplinary ways.

Many of the skills you will acquire are transferable to other contexts and therefore will be useful to you more broadly, for example, in other studies or in employment.

The main transferable skills are:

- advanced writing skills – including an ability to write with imagination and clarity, and to use fiction, poetic and life writing techniques, and dramatic scripting methods appropriate to a specific medium;
- the abilities to use digital media for research purposes, and to use computer technologies for communication and participation in online forums;

- the ability to analyse and appraise existing texts and emerging texts of a short and of a more sustained length, and to contribute to the development of such work-in-progress;
- the ability to imagine yourself in the place of potential readers, performers, directors or audience members, in order to anticipate the effect of your writing;
- the ability to write according to the specific professional layout and presentation requirements of a particular genre and/or medium;
- the ability to plan, research and write a substantial piece of work through independent study;
- the ability to contribute to group discussions and work as part of a team; to be supportive yet appropriately critical.

The learning outcomes and transferable skills are manifest in the TMAs and EMA. For instance, in TMA 03, you are asked to comment on the work of fellow students posted to the online forum. This addresses the second and third transferable skills listed above, and also the learning outcome about evaluating work and offering constructive criticism. Similarly, all the creative writing you undertake for the TMAs and the EMA will address the first of the learning outcomes and the first of the transferable skills.

Planning and writing your assignments

Consult your Study Guide for week-by-week advice and help with time management, ways to identify your subject matter, and so on. This will help you to focus in good time for each TMA. The Study Guide will also remind you regularly about planning and producing work for your EMA. Writing weeks (that is, weeks free from other study) are provided at intervals, to enable you to finalise your assignments. Check the Study Planner to see when these are.

You will note that there is no writing week for TMA 04. This is a formative proposal for your EMA project and you are expected to write it while undertaking normal weekly study. You will see that TMA 06 occurs in Part 4 of the module, during the period of independent study.

Generating ideas

Separate ideas

As you will see, TMAs 04 and 06 and the EMA are all based on one single project. TMA 02 will be an adaptation of your TMA 01 story or poem. **But with other assessments you should note that repetition and duplication of assessed work is not permitted.** Assessments may fail if they are perceived to be too similar to one another. For instance, your EMA project should be distinct and substantially different from TMA 01, TMA 02 and TMA 05.

New ideas

Beware of recycling any of the work you may have written or submitted for writing courses on which you have studied in the past – whether at the OU or other institutions. A363 is designed to help you produce new work and assesses how you develop that work. If you re-use old material, specifically work which has been assessed previously, your assignment may not meet the assessment criteria for A363.

If re-use, repetition or duplication is detected in your assessed work, a marking penalty may be applied.

Pay particular attention to the instructions and guidance for each TMA and the EMA. If in any doubt, consult your tutor.

Prior learning

A363 is a Level 3 module and your tutor will assume some level of prior learning in creative writing when assessing your work. Many of the methods that were introduced and developed in A215 will be developed further in A363. To refresh your memory, or if you have never taken A215, make sure you are familiar with the methods suggested for fiction, poetry and life writing in the A215 book *Creative Writing: A workbook with*

readings (ed. Linda Anderson, 2006). Use these methods and approaches in your writing:

- Fiction – Chapters 5–11, pp. 70–166 in the A215 Workbook. This includes work on character and setting, detailed work on point of view, work on showing and telling, story structure and developing an awareness of your reader;
- Poetry – Chapters 12–18, pp. 167–269 in the A215 Workbook. This includes work on drafting, line, voice, imagery, rhyme, form and theme;
- Life writing – Chapters 19–24, pp. 270–358 in the A215 Workbook. This includes work on starting out, using a preface, finding a form, using memory, writing different versions of a life and characters in lifewriting;
- Editing and presentation – Chapters 25, 26, 28, pp. 359–382 and pp. 397–412 in the A215 Workbook. This includes work on redrafting your work and on presentation of prose.

Your tutor will assume this level of prior learning when assessing your work.

Also, a familiarity with the tenets of the opening four chapters of the A215 Workbook will be very important when creating new work and developing the detail of your writing. These chapters give you approaches for generating new ideas and place emphasis on your writer's notebook (see the note on this on p. 12 in the A363 Study Guide).

It is imperative that you use a writer's notebook throughout A363 and that you enter into the sort of initiating and preparatory work suggested in the opening chapters of the A215 Workbook.

Doing this will not only help you generate new work, it will deepen and enrich your approach to writing and will also provide a healthy supply of discussion points to feed into your commentaries, and into the critique you have to write for TMA 03.

Forum work and TMA 03

Make sure you are aware of the extensive advice in the Study Guide about using forums and how to contribute to online discussion of creative writing.

TMA 03 is a different kind of assignment, and one that you may not have encountered before. However, it is an assignment which is appropriate at this level of creative writing study; it demands that you reflect on the writing practice of others. You will not produce creative writing or a commentary for this TMA but will write a critique about the work and discussion of your peers.

For this reason it is important to start posting work and commenting upon others' work in your tutor group forum as early in the module as possible.

This will improve your editorial skills – which will in turn accelerate the development of your writing. It will also provide discussion topics for the

whole tutor group when it comes to TMA 03, when all students will have to write their critiques.

Posting and receiving comments on writing is normal practice on A363. A recent survey revealed that creative writing students who regularly take part in forum activities achieve higher grades.

Giving feedback or critical analysis involves more than correcting basic errors – such as spelling or layout. It is more than simply saying you like or dislike a piece of work. It involves giving reasons for your claims and illustrating what you mean. It means investing imaginative energy in anticipating writers' intentions, trying to understand what they are attempting, seeing if they succeed or fail. Receiving feedback involves analysing and assessing comments on your own work in an open and engaged way. This will help you develop an honest awareness about your own writing and help develop your ability to evaluate criticism.

You should also be aware that while forum participation is considered best practice for most students, for some students participation will not be possible. These students will have legitimate reasons for non-participation. As you will see in the guidance notes for TMA 03, provision will be made for those unable to access sufficient tutor forum contributions.

Non-permitted genres

When considering the content, readership and audience of your creative writing you should avoid certain types of writing which aren't permissible because they haven't been taught on A363. These include:

- poetry for children;
- fiction for children;
- plays and films for children;
- journalism;
- academic essays;
- episodes of an existing TV series;
- theatre in education;
- animated films;
- opera;
- musical films or plays (though musical elements can be included);
- ballet;
- puppet shows;
- mime;
- pantomime;
- verse drama;
- documentary.

If in doubt about whether one of your assignments would be permissible, consult your tutor.

Writing fiction for children

Fiction for children is not a taught genre on A363, so you are strongly advised to avoid this unless you are able to achieve the kind of ‘crossover’ writing that also appeals to adults. ‘Crossover’ stories are ones that avoid a clear demarcation as children’s literature, and are in fact usually intended for an adult audience.

Classic examples include *Oliver Twist*, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Contemporary examples include works by Philip Pullman, J. K. Rowling, Kit de Waal, Meg Rosoff, Mark Haddon and Angie Thomas: their popularity with both young adult (YA) and adult readers has led to a resurgence of interest in crossover writing. Crossovers are often distinguished from children’s literature by their greater subtlety and sophistication and their addressing of ‘big issues’, as well as their featuring of a young protagonist with whom both adult and YA readers can identify. If you are contemplating this kind of fiction, you are strongly advised to consult your tutor.

References

- de Waal, K. (2017 [2016]) *My Name Is Leon*, London, Penguin.
- Dickens, C. (2003 [1838]) *Oliver Twist*, London, Penguin Classics.
- Haddon, M. (2004 [2003]) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, London, Vintage.
- Lee, H. (2005 [1960]) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, London, Vintage Future Classics.
- Rosoff, M. (2005 [2004]) *How I Live Now*, London, Puffin.
- Salinger, J.D. (1994 [1951]) *The Catcher in the Rye*, London, Penguin Books.
- Thomas, A. (2017) *The Hate U Give*, London, Walker Books.

Problems with life writing

There are several pitfalls to beware of when undertaking life writing:

- If your life writing is a form of travel writing, avoid producing work resembling tourist information. Such work will score low marks or an outright fail.
- Be aware that in many instances the border between fiction and life writing can be blurred. For example, writing the diary of a character you have invented might well be fiction, even though much else in the scenario is factual. Or if you invent the diary based on a historical but little known figure, as Richard Holmes does in *To The Tempest Given* (A215 Workbook, p. 578 and discussed on p. 334), you might be writing a form of biography, not fiction. You should try to pinpoint the genre –

fiction or life writing – you are producing, stick with your choice and ensure you name the genre on your opening page. Discuss the issue in your commentary.

- If you quote from diary extracts or letters, make sure that they are necessary and well-integrated. Excessive use of such material to pad out your assignment will result in low marks (that is, if you use 10 per cent or more of your word count on such extracts).
- If you opt to write biography, ensure that you avoid producing work which has the characteristics of an academic essay. You should aim to transform facts into narrative and to employ some fictional techniques. Work which has the feel of an essay, however good on its own terms, will risk failure.
- Avoid writing a polemical essay which advances an argument and which fails to write about lives.
- Journalism is not taught on A363. A journalistic piece is one which deals with a newsworthy event or person in the public eye, and which focuses intently on the context rather than the characters and lives involved.
- There are many genres of contemporary writing – food writing and nature writing, for instance – which are often effectively life writing. The A215 Workbook uses, for example, Nigel Slater's *Toast*. Make sure, if you are attracted to these genres, that you do not stray into writing about food or landscape at the expense of your main focus – which should be life experience.

Please consult your tutor if in any doubt about the appropriateness of your writing topic, genre or approach.

A note on ‘powerful’ material

In this module, you are encouraged to make use of your memory and experience in transformative ways, whether writing fiction, poetry, drama or life writing. It can be exhilarating to delve into personal history but also sometimes uncomfortable when painful memories are resurrected. To write about painful memories can have a healing force for the writer. Such writings can also be moving and solacing for readers. But remember that the welfare of the writer is always more important than the wonderfulness of the writing. So, if you feel that certain episodes in your life are too harrowing to re-enact in writing, you should turn to another subject. It would also be sensible not to share writings that are deeply personal in the forum unless you are certain that you will not mind them being discussed impersonally and evaluated as artistic products rather than primarily as slices of your life.

Another form of powerful material is audacious subject matter usually involving sex, disease or violence. If you use graphic content of a sexual or violent nature in any of your work, make sure it isn't gratuitous, that is, not there just for sensationalist reasons but as a legitimate part of the work for a legitimate reason. Seek the guidance of your tutor if you are ever in doubt about the appropriateness of posting any particular piece of work on the

forum. If your writing contains graphic material, you should post it as a new discussion item, and put a content warning in brackets after your subject heading (that is, ‘explicit content’) so that people can choose whether or not they want to read it.

It is important to make sure that explicit and graphic content in your TMAs and EMA isn’t gratuitous. It must earn its place and be an integrated and essential part of the writing. You can lose marks by including strong or explicit material which isn’t warranted, which is badly thought through, which is there for shock value or which is malicious in intent. With the latter you may fall foul of university regulations. If in doubt, consult your tutor.

It is important to be aware that the university has a duty of care in creating a safe environment for study. This means anything which gives rise to a legitimate concern about the safety of children or adults at risk, at any point in your studies, may be investigated further in accordance with our **Safeguarding Policy**.

Publishing work you have written for TMAs

You retain copyright of your own creative work and so may go on to publish it, although we ask you to wait until it has been assessed and you have received your feedback before you submit anything for publication. Please note that for A363, all OU materials, including the assessment tasks, your grade and any tutor comments, remain the property of the OU and must not be shared or published. This advice applies only to A363; different rules apply to other modules. If you are in any doubt you should speak to the Student Casework Office for advice before publishing your work.

Plagiarism and creative writing

The Open University takes plagiarism very seriously, and defines it as submitting an assignment that contains work that is not your own, without indicating this to the marker. For further clarification of your responsibilities as a student, and for links to the OU’s policy on this, you should check the ‘Assessment information for Arts modules’ on the module website.

Creative writing courses are no different from other academic courses in this respect. Copying another person’s work – whether by an established writer, a popular blogger or a fellow student – is a serious matter. What’s more, it can be easily spotted by tutors, who are tuned in to erratic changes of style or content. Also, you should be aware that the University routinely scans assignments using text-comparison software. In academic courses, accusations of plagiarism can be avoided by use of appropriate referencing and by the acknowledgement of sources (see the ‘Assessment information for Arts modules’ on appropriate methods of doing this, for instance in your commentaries). With creative writing, the matter is more difficult.

Studying any creative writing course will involve you in a process of assimilation. You will read established writers and learn how they have done certain things, and you will often try to emulate their methods.

Similarly, from seeing the work of other students, you will learn from their successes and failures and you will spot techniques that you might want to try yourself. Sometimes this emulation will be fully conscious, sometimes it might be less so. Either way this is not copying or plagiarism, but rather one of the major benefits of such courses. In most cases when you try out an element of another writer's technique, that element becomes uniquely your own – you change it subtly or even dramatically. Your tutor will be well aware of the need to 'try things out', so don't let the fear of plagiarism inhibit you.

If you're ever in any doubt, especially about work for your TMAs, consult your tutor.

Writing a commentary

Many aspects of writing are instinctive. Yet all writing requires more than just instinct. The process of writing is both instinctual and analytical. The writer needs an understanding of the elements of craft and technique, to be aware of how words might be sculpted and carved, and how they might be arranged and rearranged to cause different effects. The writer needs to be capable of sometimes meticulous redrafting and editing, and needs to be alert to the lessons available in others' writing. Skilful writing comes from skilful reading – readings of your own work, readings of published works and readings of the writing of your fellow students.

Your commentaries should reflect all of this. They might give glimpses of the instinctual or even apparently accidental parts of your writing, and they might also be a venue for discussion of the analytical side of your writing.

Commentaries provide you with an opportunity to consider the various contributing factors in your creative process. For instance, you might:

- offer an analysis of your creative process;
- account for the ways in which your reading has informed your writing, in terms of both content and craft (remember, as well as other stories, novels, memoirs, biographies and poetry, this reading can include the Handbook and other 'writing on writing' that you come across, or indeed what you hear, such as the recorded CD interviews with writers);
- comment on the technical obstacles you have encountered and the tactics you have employed to overcome them;
- attempt to place your creative work in the context of any wider reading or studies;
- discuss your approach to editing and redrafting.

Commentaries can also be reflective. You might ask certain questions of your work:

- What did you aim to achieve, and did the finished product match or frustrate your ambitions?
- What have you learned in producing this work, both as a writer and as a reader?

It is useful to engage explicitly with some of the notions about writing introduced in the module and use some of the vocabulary (montage, status, rhetoric, analogy, voice register, and so on) in your commentaries as you proceed through the module.

Using this vocabulary will reveal how well you have grasped some of the advocated methods and ideas, and develop sophistication in the way you think and write about your work. While the commentary might be a slightly more academic form of writing, you should still try to achieve an individual voice and a personal approach to what you are writing about. It is normal to write commentaries using the first-person ('I') voice.

The idea is to start using a vocabulary appropriate to this level of study, a vocabulary which reveals that you are reading as a writer and developing a writer's voice in talking about your writing. Remember, a good story or set of poems doesn't necessarily guarantee a good commentary: you still have to pay attention to the different demands of this specific form of writing in order to achieve a good mark.

Your writer's notebook is an essential tool in helping with your commentary. If you use your notebook well, you will be able to refer back to it and spot crucial points in the production of any piece of writing: you will be able to trace the journey from conception to completion. You can use it to jot down initial ideas, early versions of sentences, observations and contributory, but ultimately rejected, ideas. Your notebook can also be the repository of your responses to exercises in the Handbook, as well as being a potentially detailed log of your reading.

Of course, you cannot submit your notebook for assessment but you can refer to it and quote from it when writing your commentary. Similarly, the tutor group forum can be very useful when writing your commentary. You can look back over responses to your work, even quoting from the forum when such commentary seems important. You can also refer to comments made about another piece of work on the forum, or comments about a published text under discussion, if such comments seem pertinent to the decision-making in your own writing. Be careful of over-quoting though – make sure that you provide a narrative which makes sense of your illustrations.

You should not submit earlier drafts of your poems or stories with your commentary but you can discuss and quote from these earlier drafts to illustrate a point, as long as the quote is not merely padding and contributes to a considered account of how your idea developed.

Remember that each of the commentaries will have different demands. There are specific notes and/or instructions for each commentary included in the guidance notes for each TMA. For instance, in the commentary for the

EMA you might give much more detail about your development as a writer (while still focusing on the submitted work), whereas the commentary for TMA 01 will be more focused on the specific piece of work produced for it.

Your commentary should never offer a theoretical or review-type critique of the end product as if you had nothing to do with it.

Nevertheless, because the commentary is a type of essay, you should make sure to use the conventions of academic referencing when referring to, or quoting from, other texts, including when quoting comments made on the forum. (See the Library's '**OU Harvard Guide to citing references**' for a comprehensive how-to and examples.) Similarly, when referring to A363 materials – for example a particular section of the Handbook, or a clip on the DVD or a track on one of the CDs – always remember to reference these correctly. You should also always include a reference list (bibliography) at the end of your commentary; you may lose marks if you omit it.

Presenting your work

On all assignments remember to:

- Number your pages. This is normal, professional practice and makes it easier for your tutor to refer to particular points when giving feedback;
- Head each page with your name and personal identifier number. You should be able to place page numbers, names, and so on, in the ‘header’ of your word-processed document;
- Indicate, at the start of your creative work, which genre you are using (that is, life writing, fiction, poetry or script) and, when appropriate, which medium you are writing for (that is, stage, radio, film);
- Give your creative work a title;
- Give your commentary a heading.

Text layout

Prose TMAs and EMA

For prose TMAs and for prose submissions in your EMA – the creative writing elements, commentaries, and critiques – use the standard professional text layout detailed below. Besides helping you to produce readable, uncluttered manuscripts, this will get you into the habit of presenting your work as required by publishers.

Here are some basic guidelines which you should always keep to:

- Use double-line spacing;
- Have margins at each side of at least 3 cm (in most cases, this is the standard word-processor default setting). Do not justify lines to the right-hand margin;
- Use 12-point standard serif font (Times New Roman);
- The first line of every paragraph should be indented, with the exception of the first in each chapter or section;
- There should be no extra space between paragraphs (tip: you will probably need to adjust your word processor’s automatic paragraph settings to achieve this);
- A line space (or blank line) between paragraphs is only used when indicating a section break – a change of scene, of viewpoint or that some time has passed. In a commentary, it signifies a shift to a new section in the discussion. The first line of the next paragraph following such a line space should not be indented;
- Asterisks can be used to draw attention to a section break that falls at the end of a page and might therefore be missed by the reader;
- Please refer to the Library’s **‘OU Harvard Guide to citing references’** for advice on giving references in your assignments.

You can find further guidance on presentation in Chapter 28 of the A215 Workbook.

Here is a brief example of how the prose in your assignments should look:

This is the opening of the piece of fiction or life writing you are undertaking, and has therefore used the left-hand margin. You can see it uses double-line spacing but the first paragraph isn't indented.

This is the opening of the second paragraph. It has been clearly indented from the margin, and there is no space between the first paragraph and the second paragraph. This pattern should continue throughout a prose piece, until there is a section break, as indicated above.

Presentation of dialogue (in prose fiction or life writing)

The general rule is that each person's speech should begin a new paragraph – indented, of course. Use **single** quotation marks for all speech and quoted words within your text. Use double quotation marks only when the quoted word or phrase occurs within a passage which is already in quotation marks. For example:

This is the opening line of the piece, so it is aligned with the left-hand margin. The first section of dialogue will start a new paragraph.

'I can't explain it,' she said. 'I've just gone off you.'

'So you're not going to give me an explanation,' Stephen said.

'Just that you've "gone off" me.'

Poetry TMAs and EMA

Stanza breaks and the gap between the title and first line of the poem should be indicated by a line space (or blank line). Poems should use single-line spacing within stanzas. Do not centre your poems' lines on the page: the margin should be positioned on the left of the page, just like for prose, although this does not prevent you from indenting lines during the course of a poem, as in the examples on pp. 239–40 and p. 241 of the Handbook. A title should be in bold type.

Please note that none of the above advice rules out innovative approaches that deliberately explore the page as a visual or typographical space.

Drama TMAs and EMA

When submitting a stage, radio or film script for a TMA or your EMA you must format it using the layout appropriate for each medium. There are different fonts advised depending on medium, for instance. You can find advice on the appropriate layouts in the following chapters of the Handbook, and also via links provided on the A363 website:

- Advice on stage layout can be found in Chapter 4, pp. 43–6 of the Handbook – for stage you should use 12pt font, either Courier New or Times New Roman;
- Advice on radio layout can be found in Chapter 7, pp. 97–9 of the Handbook and via Week 8 resources on the A363 website – for radio you should use 12pt Arial font (that is, sans serif);
- Advice on film layout can be found in Chapter 8, pp. 124–6 of the Handbook and via Week 9 resources on the A363 website – for film you should use 12pt Courier New font.

Where there are discrepancies between pp. 124–6 and other examples in the course material or elsewhere, the advice on pp. 124–6 takes priority and should be followed for your own work.

Do not use any scriptwriting software as your tutor and those who have to monitor assignments might not be able to access, read or place comments on your assignments if you do so.

Word counts and performance times

Writing to a stipulated length is an important skill and you should aim to comply with the stated word counts and performance times for your TMAs and EMA. Put an accurate word count at the end of each part of your TMA. Put a line count at the end of poetry submissions. Put a performance time at the end of scripts. Note that titles, footnotes and epigraphs are not included in word or line counts for your creative work but that any embedded quotations are. If you use them, footnotes will be included in the word count for commentaries and cannot therefore be used to expand your commentary beyond the permitted word limit.

For more information on word limits, including marking penalties for going over-length, please refer to ‘Assessment information for Arts Modules’, available from the Assessment section of the module website.

With stage, radio and film scripts, if you use the layouts advised in the Handbook you will be able to work out average performance times from the number of pages of your script. Following the layouts for stage and film will give you an average performance time of one minute per page; for radio this is 45 seconds per page. Although these averages are not necessarily accurate in terms of real-life/actual performance times, for the purposes of assessment for this module it is permissible to follow them.

The only way to time a script more precisely is to read through it in real performance time, including all of the actions, sound effects, pauses and

dialogue in your enactment. It is also permissible to use this method to calculate your script's performance time; the choice is yours.

Guidance notes

TMA 01 guidance

The instructions for this assignment can be found under 'Assessment resources' on the A363 website.

Option 1 – prose

Your story for this assignment can be fiction or life writing. If you consider it to be a mixture of fiction and life writing which is difficult to label, make sure you pick a label and discuss the issue in your commentary.

The story that you write for TMA 01 will be the basis for your TMA 02, when you will be asked to adapt it into a script for a dramatic medium of your choice. You should not try to anticipate this process in what you write, other than to do what would in any case be sensible in a piece only 1500 words long – avoid, for instance, too many characters or locations, or too great a passage of time.

You should not write about material which would be inherently difficult to adapt. This might be especially true of some life writing projects, ones which are based on memory or tied rigidly to historical facts. It can also be true of some fiction, where there is a strong focus on the interior life of a single character. You should be wary of producing a story which is too static or too limiting in its content.

There will be scope for altering the original story and making it more dramatic during the adaptation process (you will be able to add or subtract characters and scenes, for instance). But you should be wary of material which you would not like to develop further or which you would not like to dramatise or change.

Remember that you will have to stay with this idea for a considerable amount of time, exploring its nuances and developing its characters. If you have any doubts, consult your tutor.

In Weeks 5–10, you will receive plenty of advice on how to adapt your material for TMA 02, and you may end up condensing, expanding, editing and altering it quite substantially. However, for TMA 01, once you have chosen the focus of your material, concentrate on the success of the writing on its own terms. Try to make the story work without regard for the dramatisation to follow.

It is expected that you will have considered the first three chapters of the Creative Writing Handbook in what you write. Also, check the guidance about planning your TMAs in this booklet, especially the advice about prior learning and non-permitted genres.

Here are some of the questions you should ask yourself when writing your story:

- What use have you made of the conventions of genre?
- How have you played with your readers' expectations?
- What consideration have you given to pace and rhythm?
- How have you ensured that your readers maintain their interest?
- What sources of tension are there in what you have written?
- What research have you done into your piece of writing?
- What kinds of cutting and editing have you undertaken?

Whether your piece is fiction or life writing, you should also ask yourself:

- From whose point of view is your narrative told? Could you tell it better from another point of view?
- Have you got the right balance of showing and telling? In general, the most important actions and moments should be shown, rather than told.
- Does your dialogue sound natural?
- Have you involved the reader with your characters?
- Have you used conflict or contrast to give the narrative tension?
- Is there momentum in your writing?

When you have drafted your writing, read it aloud to yourself to assess it for clarity, pace, fluency and rhythm. Try to allow some time for reflection and editing before you complete your final draft.

Option 2 – poetry

You should not attempt the poetry option for this TMA unless you have completed prior learning in poetry – such as the poetry section of A215. See the ‘prior learning’ section of this booklet for further guidance. If in doubt consult with your tutor.

Your poem does not necessarily have to ‘tell a story’ as such, since 30–36 lines of poetry may not provide you with sufficient space to develop a narrative.

Although it is sensible to remember that your poem will be the basis for a dramatic adaptation, it is more important that your poem works in its own right. Don’t design your poem solely with adaptation in mind. During Weeks 5–10 you will receive ample advice about how to adapt your material, and your original poem will inevitably change considerably in adaptation. You should not try to anticipate that process.

Two useful things for you to focus on are ‘**image**’ and ‘**incident**’. You should aim to write a poem which captures a particular moment, vividly re-creating it for the reader, and which explores the essence or significance of that moment (the ‘incident’). Images are crucial in bringing poems to life and re-creating an incident or experience for the reader. Your poem might have a key image (or group of images) that suggests the mood, action or

importance of your subject. It might also help you to think of the poem as a snapshot – a still image which you are later going to use in developing a short script. As with Option 1, you will be spending a considerable amount of time with this idea and so should be wary of material that you would not like to develop further or that you would not like to dramatise or change.

There are four poems in the first three chapters and associated readings in the Creative Writing Handbook which suggest the sort and range of focus you should aim for in your poem. One poem describes a man studying a photograph ('Uncle, New Zealand, 1941'); one poem describes a woman being clothed and led to see what bee-keeping is like ('The Bee Meeting'); one poem describes a man confusing swallows and bats ('Bat'); one poem is in the voice of a threatening adult ('We Remember Your Childhood Well'). None of the four poems, which are very different in style, uses a protracted period of time. Each explores, re-imagines, or develops an incident, one of which appears to be autobiographical in origin ('The Bee Meeting'), and one of which appears to have come from imagined experience ('We Remember Your Childhood Well'). Each limits the scope of what is explored.

When you come to adapt your poem, you will be using that incident, moment or image as a key moment in the narrative of a dramatised story. For this reason, you should especially avoid writing a discursive poem, or one which involves abstractions.

Here are some of the questions you should ask yourself when writing your poem:

- What consideration have you given to pace and rhythm?
- Is there a clear focal point in your poem?
- What thought have you given to using words which express sensory feeling?
- Do the images in the poem work, separately and together, to help make the moment(s) you are exploring vivid for the reader?
- Have you avoided archaic words and inversions?
- Are there words or lines which explain too much, which could be cut from the poem without altering its impact?
- Does your poem use interesting comparisons or other kinds of figurative language?
- What kind of voice is used in the poem? Is it consistent?
- Can you visualise the moment(s) you are exploring?
- What research has contributed to the poem?
- Does your poem use sound in an interesting and appropriate way?
- Are you sacrificing meaning and rhythm in order to fit a full end rhyme? Do not do so.
- Have you considered using other kinds of echo, such as slant or half rhyme?

- When you have drafted your writing, read it aloud to yourself to assess it for clarity, pace and rhythm. Try to allow some time for reflection and editing before you complete your final draft.

Also read the ‘Poetry and language’ section in the EMA guidance later in this booklet. Much of the advice there will be relevant to this TMA.

Commentary

Remember to focus on discussing the creative process involved in your work. You are asked to explain the decisions you have taken. Quote briefly from your writing and your reading, where relevant, in order to support your statements.

You should refer to sections of the module materials – the Handbook and CDs and the A215 Workbook – in explaining your decisions, where relevant. You may also refer to further or outside reading.

Here are three very short invented extracts as examples, the first on a short story, the second on a passage of life writing, and the third on a poem:

Example 1

The source of my story was an image from the short film in which Laurel and Hardy try to carry a piano up a long flight of steps. This became a narrative about a mother and her student daughter trying to take an old mangle to a tip. The mangle triggers a series of memories of childhood for the mother. The journey to the tip is really a method of pitting the mother against the daughter (the mother thinks the daughter is idle). I had to research some of the kinds of household appliances that would have been used in the 1940s, which I did by looking at advertisements in old newspapers, as suggested in Chapter 3 of *A Creative Writing Handbook* (ed. Neale, 2009, p. 28).

I realised it would be more interesting if the mother turned out to be the idle one (thus contradicting the stereotype of the lazy student). I also decided to give the mother an unusual vocabulary to make her voice more pronounced, as when she announces, ‘I am utterly discombobulated.’ Originally, I alternated the mother’s viewpoint with that of the daughter, but I thought that would be too confusing for the reader and settled on an omniscient narrator instead.

In a way, the genre I am using is farce, because of all the accidents that nearly keep happening, but I am ‘going against the grain’ of the genre (Neale, 2009, p. 6), by making it darker. I planned that there would be an injury at the end, and tried to wrong-foot the reader into thinking it would be the mother who would suffer it.

References

The Music Box (1932) Directed by James Parrott [Film]. Hal Roach Studios.

Neale, D. (2009) 'Playing with genre' in Neale, D. (ed.) *A Creative Writing Handbook*, Milton Keynes/London, A&C Black in association with The Open University.

Greenwell, B. (2009) 'Vision and revision' in Neale, D. (ed.) *A Creative Writing Handbook*, Milton Keynes/London, A&C Black in association with The Open University.

Example 2

I have a close friend who lived in a house which was (allegedly) haunted, and she told me frequently about episodes involving a poltergeist. The descriptions she gave me were not of the kind you see in horror films, although they were disquieting. I did some research into poltergeists, including reading a study by Colin Wilson (1982), in order to acquire some detail based on more than my friend's brief experience.

In my piece, I wanted to avoid being sensationalistic, because I think this makes writing horror absurd. So my main tactic was to keep the writing very plain and understated. That meant, in my view, that the strange real-life account I had written would be all the more disturbing. I cut and cut, taking out anything that was suggestive of the horror genre. I aimed at all times for restraint, in order to make my life writing more absorbing.

Also, after advice from my tutor, I realised that I needed to transform my narrative because it read too much like an essay; I was just recording factual information about the phenomenon rather than dramatising it for the reader. I attempted to improve the writing by imagining the smallest details of my friend's mysterious encounters, trying to conjure up the place, time, atmosphere and sense of fear, but without stating 'She was scared stiff'.

References

Wilson, C. (1982) *Poltergeist! A study in destructive haunting*, Sevenoaks, New English Library.

Note that this example is less substantive than Example 1, as it lacks references to A363 materials or any learning brought to bear from them, apart from the brief mention of the tutor's advice.

Example 3

The original image for my poem ‘Waiting’ came from seeing a queue outside a cinema. It occurred to me that the people in the queue, who were quite animated, were unlike the people you see in queues for buses, trains, passport checks and so on. This in turn started me thinking of the way in which people wait in silence at a health centre or a dental practice. I was interested in both how way people can look like waxworks while waiting and how they lower their voices in public places, and I thought it would be interesting to explore these ideas in a short poem.

I held on to the idea of the animated queue, and created images of people who were ironically active in places where ‘English reserve’ usually characterises behaviour. I wanted to make sure that the lines were clear, unfussy, and direct:

The congregation puts up its hands in the sermon,
uncorking some awkward thoughts. In the back pews
there is a riot going on. In the supermarket queue
the shoppers pop their questions, and one woman
leads a fine line in high kicks ...

The rhyming is discreet and deliberately inexact (sermon/woman, pews/queue) because I felt that a more pronounced rhyme would make the poem too jokey, and would detract from the serious comedy of exploring why we are so obedient when asked to wait.

In the first draft, I set the whole poem in the church, but I decided on revision that it would be important to bring together images from different sources, to create a series of absurd but telling images. I redrafted the poem several times to make it sound conversational, while still using the occasional word with more expressive power – like ‘uncorking’ in the second line, which suggests celebration, but is immediately damped down by meaning of, and internal rhyme with, the word ‘awkward’.

This example offers strong analysis of the student’s creative choices, but lacks references to A363 materials and the learning applied from them, tutor or other student feedback, or any other kind of reading. A list of references is also missing.

TMA 02 guidance

The instructions for this assignment can be found under ‘Assessment resources’ on the A363 website.

Choosing a medium

One of your first choices should be which medium you are going to write for. There should be no ambiguity – you must commit yourself to one of the three options. You cannot, for instance, say ‘This could be for radio or stage.’

Your play or film should have a title and you should name the medium on your opening page (for example, play for radio).

Make your choice of medium as soon as possible, while you proceed through Part 2 of the module. Preview the chapters on all of the media and pick a medium which you wish to write for and which you think is best suited to your TMA 01 material. You can do this before doing all the reading or doing all the writing exercises for that medium. Focus most of your energy on the chapters devoted to your chosen medium. You should still work through the other chapters and there will, of course, be considerable crossover between the media. Parts of the chapters on stage writing, for instance, will be relevant to writing dialogue when you get to writing for radio and film. But Level 3 study involves making particular choices and focusing in specific and calculated ways in order to achieve the best possible work. Choosing your medium early is an example of this.

Place your cast list at the beginning of your script. If you are writing for stage, establish a set and imagine a preferred stage for the performance. For stage or film, write a set description at the start of your script (after the cast list but before the action starts) and at any subsequent scene changes where the set alters. There is no definitive length for a set description, but it is better to keep it brief. Some examples are shown in the Handbook (pp. 79–81), but these are relatively long. A set description can be just a couple of lines, as long as the set-up and essential storytelling elements are put in place.

Cast list

Whatever medium you choose, you have to provide a cast list, with brief character descriptions – these should be just a few words, with a maximum of one line for each character. You may be penalised (up to 5 marks) if you omit this.

Here is an example:

Jennifer Joyce: twenties; junior doctor

David Joyce: fifties, Jennifer's father; too interested in her friends

Muriel Joyce: ghost, David's dead mother, carries Pekinese dog in her arms

Susan: Jennifer's best friend, nurse, a worrier

Several of Jennifer's other friends

Radio announcer

Newspaper journalists

Make all such information as concise as possible. Only give descriptive detail if it's essential to the story. Sometimes occupations will offer useful information, sometimes not – Jennifer's occupation is included above because it is essential to the story, as is Susan's; David's isn't mentioned because it is irrelevant to the story. Susan's age doesn't need to be stated because it can be assumed that she is a similar age to Jennifer. In the same way, the age of Muriel is not needed. As seen with David and Susan, it is better to give some brief detail of a character's behaviour, desires or fears, than inconsequential details about appearance. The information about Muriel's dog has to be included because it's essential to the plot – later, at a vital point in the action. You should list the more minor characters without giving any further details, as you can see with the other friends, the radio announcer and newspaper journalists.

Script layout

You should use the script layout advised for each medium in the Handbook:

- in Chapter 4, pp. 43–6, for stage
- in Chapter 7, pp. 97–9, for radio
- in Chapter 8, pp. 124–6, for film.

Do not use any scriptwriting software as your tutor and those who have to monitor assignments might not be able to access, read or place comments on your assignments if you do so.

If you choose film, you can write for cinema or television – in either case use the layout advised in Chapter 8.

Adaptation possibilities

As you proceed with the adaptation, you will have to choose whether you keep faithfully to the original or treat it more 'promiscuously' (using David Hare's term). Is it a straightforward adaptation or have you 'based' your script more liberally on the initial piece of writing? There is considerable

scope for changing the original story or poem. This might be particularly necessary if your first TMA wasn't successful; sometimes material which previously wasn't fully realised or didn't entirely succeed can work extremely well in adaptation. In adapting your material, you may find it necessary to cut or add characters, to add extra scenes, to adjust the plot or timescale, or to make other alterations. You will find that a number of narrative options will open up to you when writing your adaptation, and some will close down.

You should aim to produce the best possible drama, and not feel unduly tied by the constraints of the original story or poem. However, you should try to convey the essence of the original work. Your tutor will need to be able to see the link between the two versions.

It is important to remember that this is a new piece of work and has the potential to achieve a very different mark from the mark you achieved in TMA 01. A low mark or high for TMA 01 will not necessarily lead to a similar mark for TMA 02. Much depends on how you use the appropriate techniques and the amount of effort you put into the adaptation. If in doubt about how to go about your adaptation, or if you feel that you may be straying too far from your TMA 01 work, consult your tutor.

If you wrote poetry for TMA 01, you will inevitably need to elaborate on the scenario suggested by your poem. For instance, if your poem involved a single voice, moment or image, then you will have to augment this and, in effect, use the poem as a prompt. You are free to invent further characters, events, settings, circumstances and backstory, as you see fit. In this sense you will be adapting in a most liberal fashion.

But remember that the link with the original poem has to be apparent to your tutor. You can discuss this relationship in your commentary. If in doubt consult with your tutor. Many possibilities may be available to you. Some examples of the possibilities for adapting a poem: a stage adaptation of the poem on p. 16 of the Handbook, 'Uncle, New Zealand, 1941', might create a dramatisation of a wedding; a radio version might dramatise the interiority of the uncle, creating him as an absent narrator during the dramatic exchanges at the wedding. The Carol Ann Duffy poem, 'We Remember Your Childhood Well', on pp. 17–18, could lead to a television adaptation: a child and her parents in family therapy, with flashbacks of contrasting and contradictory versions of the past. The very filmic setting for D. H. Lawrence's poem 'Bat', on pp. 23–4, might prompt some newly invented characters and events to inhabit the scene. These inventions would help dramatise the transformation from tranquility into something far more agitated and disturbed, matching the movement in the poem.

You should not script a 'dramatised reading' of your poem in which one or more characters or narrators read the poem out, while others mime action (stage) or while sample pictures are shown on the screen (film) or while illustrative sound effects are heard (radio).

Whether you're adapting a story or a poem, in nearly all circumstances it is better to think of your adaptation as 'telling a story' and you should structure it accordingly. And whatever the genre of the original work, your

adaptation will be expected to contain the usual elements of a dramatic script: dialogue, scenes, sets, action and stage directions.

Before scripting

It is important to think about how your chosen medium best serves your adaptation. You then need to remember the restrictions and strengths of that medium. Check back over Chapter 7 in the Handbook if you have chosen radio; Chapters 8 and 9 for film; and Chapters 4–6 for stage, though these opening chapters in Part 2 of the Handbook also cover dramatic principles that are relevant to all media (that is, dialogue, exposition, status). Also, refer to the DVD and CDs 1 and 2 for examples of different approaches.

Before you start scripting, try to establish a structural shape to your adaptation. There are several places in the Handbook (Chapters 4–9) that approach ways of creating dramatic action, a shape of beginning–middle–end, and a dramatic arc, with a rising action, climax and resolution. You should look back over these sections and apply such methods to your own work.

In the Handbook ways are also suggested of how to go about the preparatory, pre-scripting work of planning and establishing a structure and shape for your work. For instance, you could storyboard your narrative, as featured in the Handbook, p. 114 (this is always done in the development of film scripts). Alternatively, you could write a scenario as you tried in Activity 6.6 or as seen in the Gooch example on pp. 89–90 in the Handbook; or you could write a step outline for your drama (as seen in Activity 9.1 on pp. 135–6). Step outlines are usually used for films but you can also use them to establish the structure of your radio or stage play.

It is important to break the action of your drama down into smaller parts. Establish what scenes will be needed – what locations, what timescale you are using. Then plot how the scenes fit together.

Caution: monologue and voice-over

Caution is needed when using certain dramatic techniques that are taught on the module – these include voice-over, stage monologue and radio narration. These methods should not dominate your dramatisation but should be used in moderation and in many cases not at all. If you use them, make sure that such methods are fully integrated and necessary. Beware of writing adaptations which are in effect just slightly enhanced readings of a story or a poem. This assignment requires you to create scenes and structure for your dramatisation in a fashion which uses less expository narration than is used in most prose storytelling.

Monologues should be used with great caution and only when the storytelling really demands it. You should avoid writing a play consisting of a single monologue or a series of monologues. If you do use monologue in parts of your play, follow the guidance in the Handbook about making monologues dramatic (pp. 62, 105).

If you are considering using voice-over in your film, follow the guidance offered in the Handbook (p.142) and Study Guide (pp. 60, 65) about using

the technique cautiously. It should not be used to convey major tracts of exposition.

Characters and voices

When developing your characters for this adaptation – whatever the medium – think of their voices and how well the dialogue is working. Try some of the methods suggested by Mark Ravenhill and Alan Ayckbourn on CD1. You should also:

- be aware of the subtext you are creating in your scenes;
- think of the status relationship between your characters;
- ensure your stage directions are concise;
- say all the lines aloud to make sure that they fit the characters;
- ensure that lines can be spoken and are not too ‘written’ or sentence-bound – it is easy to sound too grammatically correct when writing drama for the first time;
- listen for the pace and rhythm both within the speech patterns of individual characters and between the characters within an exchange;
- identify the arc of movement: the dramatic action in your overall script, but also within each scene.

Ensure that the media-specific elements that help tell the story – the physical and visual narrative, the sound effects, the props – are all clear and concise.

Remember that drama, for any medium, is always an economical form of writing and that you are writing in the first instance for actors. They will be the interpreters of your script, together with the director, set designer, cinematographer and producer. They need the script to be clear and instructive but they also want to be able to use their imaginations when making a performance from a script. Overwritten scripts, which offer too much instruction and detail, can deter performers because they leave no room for interpretation.

Drafting

After you have completed your script development work – planning your scenes, writing your step outline or scenario, or drawing a storyboard – write an early draft of the adaptation and allow as much time as you are able before you complete your final draft.

Commentary

You will already have submitted the source material of this assignment for TMA 01 and received comment on it. You should reflect on any comments you received from your tutor on TMA 01 that are relevant to the adaptation process. You can use such remarks, or those of fellow students, in revealing how you went about the adaptation.

- Why did you choose the medium you settled on?

- What were the technical difficulties?
- How did you solve them?

You are not asked to evaluate what you have done, but to explain the decisions you have taken. Where relevant, and in order to support your statements, you can quote briefly from your writing, your notebooks, your reading and from forum exchanges. It is useful here to show a connection between your thinking, the reasons for some of your choices, and the effects that elements within the module (the Handbook chapters, CD tracks, DVD clips and forum exchanges) have had on your decision-making. You can refer to and quote from your scenario and step outline if you wish, but do not include whole scenarios or step outlines in your commentary. Extracts from storyboards difficult to present in your commentary and should be avoided.

Here is an invented extract from a commentary where the student chose radio:

My tutor suggested that the strength of my story lay in my use of a first-person narrator – a character who has a problem with being able to get out of the house after a bereavement. I agreed with her but at first I was disheartened. The original was largely an internal story, concerned with a relatively slight emotional shift in my character – the boy manages to persuade himself to go to the concert he had planned on attending with the friend who died. It didn't hold enough dramatic potential. I wanted to write for stage, but realised that this story did not lend itself to the theatre. I eventually chose radio, after some experimentation with stage monologues. This was mainly because, as Jane Rogers suggests (2008, Track 5), radio allows 'you to go into a person's head – you can hear their thoughts – it's incredibly intimate'.

I wrote a step outline for the play, separating the narrative into six scenes and describing the location, timescale and action in each scene. I assumed initially that I could just transcribe the voice of the story into a radio script format, and add a few extra lines. I soon learned my lesson. After posting some of the early scenes on my tutor group forum I received feedback such as the following: 'If I was an actor I wouldn't like to play this part; I wouldn't be able to say the lines'; and 'I found it very confusing with all these names being mentioned.' In order for the action to be clear to the listener I had to reduce the cast size. I combined two characters into one and cut two other very minor characters. I also worked a lot on the speech patterns of my main character, making his voice more 'dialogic' by including exchanges with other characters within his monologue ('He said you've got to, and I said no'), as suggested in the work on voice (Neale, 2009, Chapter 5). Generally I found that I had to dramatise much more of the narrative and the 'telling', ultimately leaving very little narration and hardly any of the interior voice that I so liked in the original story. Some of the dramatised episodes were evident in the original, some were newly invented – I had to create them to make the adaptation fully dramatic, and 'to stop my audience falling asleep' as one forum commentator put

it (Smith, 2009). My tutor also cautioned me against writing an 'enhanced reading', which she explained was really a reading of a story in a dramatic voice. She suggested I needed to fully dramatise events, to create dialogue and scenes.

References

- Neale, D. (ed.) (2009) *A Creative Writing Handbook*, Milton Keynes/London, A & C Black in association with The Open University.
- Rogers, J. (2008) Interview, A363 CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*, OU/Pier Productions.
- Smith, S. (2009) 're: radio play: False Alarm', Workshop sub-forum, A363 tutor group forum, 10 January.

TMA 03 guidance

The instructions for this assignment can be found under 'Assessment resources' on the A363 website.

Tutor group forums

In order to write your critique you will have to read the messages and attached work of your fellow students on your tutor group forum. You can access the forum from StudentHome and from the A363 website.

If you have any technical problems accessing or reading work from your tutor group forum, you should check with the online Computing Guide at www.open.ac.uk/computingguide/start.html.

If you continue to have problems, you can get assistance from the Computing Helpdesk, telephone: +44 (0)1908 653972.

If you are unable to read a sufficient number of forum messages for any other reasons, please contact your tutor. Provision will be made available for students who are unable to access a sufficient number of forum contributions.

Why write a critique?

This TMA will enable you to apply the editorial skills you use in your own writing to the work of your fellow students. In turn, your reflection on the work of others will give rise to further thought, which will influence and enhance your own writing, editing and redrafting processes. You can chart this further thought and influence in your critique.

What is a critique?

A critique is a critical analysis of writing and discussion about writing. It surveys and evaluates method, form, content and craft; it reflects on the

different attitudes to those aspects in the context of particular pieces of writing.

As a form of writing, a ‘critique’, as we use the term in this assignment, resembles a commentary. But it has basic differences from commentaries. Your critique should focus on the work and discussion points of other writers. It should not focus on your own work, though it should contain some reflection on your own approach to writing, that is, how this discussion has relevance to your own writing practice (for instance, how what you’ve learned from analysing this discussion can be applied to your own writing in future).

Your critique must be written about work posted on your tutor group forum. It can focus on any work, from the start of the module onwards. It can focus on one piece of work and the discussion surrounding it, or many pieces of work and related discussion.

Approaches

There is guidance on how to approach the writing of your critique in the Study Guide.

In the ‘Assessment Scale’ section later in this booklet there is a table relating specifically to this assignment, giving descriptions of the type of content relevant for each marking band. You will find this helpful in deciding what to include and what not to include in your critique.

First, identify one or more pieces of work that have been submitted to the forum by fellow students. Your critique should offer an assessment of this work, how it has been commented on, and how it may have changed as a consequence in subsequent drafts. You can comment on whether:

- you participated in the particular discussion about a piece of work;
- you agreed or disagreed with the general consensus of opinion;
- you would have redrafted in the same way as the author in question;
- the redrafting was successful;
- the discussion ties in with issues raised in the Handbook, CDs, DVD or your further reading, listening and viewing;
- you think the work is written appropriately for a particular genre or medium;
- a writer has taken action but decided it doesn’t work;
- a writer has resisted taking action;
- the discussion has relevance to your own writing.

Note:

- You must include analysis of the discussion surrounding the creative writing. You may lose marks if you only discuss the writing. If there is little discussion about a piece of work which you think is essential to your critique, state this.

- You may also lose marks if you only write about the discussion points and issues without providing brief details of the work involved.
- A critique is unlikely to be successful if it is just a list of forum quotations, A363 materials and other reading. It is important that your critique offers a considered discussion and analysis.

What to write about

The pieces of work you examine can be structurally complete or incomplete: for instance, they can be part of a story or a whole story. They can include writing produced in response to an exercise in the Handbook or on the A363 website, and writing which is work in progress towards an assignment.

You can write about one piece of creative writing or more than one piece.

You may, if you wish, write about an author's TMA 01 and how it was adapted into TMA 02. If doing so, remember to include analysis of the discussion surrounding the works.

You should if possible write about work which is redrafted and reposted after discussion. If in your forum there aren't many pieces of work reposted after being redrafted, then you can just comment on the discussion that has taken place about work that has been posted. Make sure that you don't comment only on your own discussion postings. You should not just reiterate or elaborate too prominently on an opinion you have voiced on the forum. Your critique should reflect a range of opinions.

There is no restriction on what genre you might discuss – it can be fiction, poetry, life writing or any dramatic medium. Give evidence when you make claims about a piece of work and about what someone has said about that work, or more generally about a writing technique. You can do this by quoting from the writing under discussion, from the forum messages, from A363 materials, or from other texts, performances and sources which you have researched or encountered outside of the module (though the primary focus should be work and discussion posted on the forum). Ensure you include a bibliography at the end of your critique that includes all the references you use in your discussion.

One approach you can take is to identify a problem or issue in your own writing – perhaps you have difficulty writing dialogue. Go to the forum and identify pieces of work which, in your opinion, contain either good or bad dialogue. Analyse the discussion around these pieces of work; develop the discussion at certain points and reflect back on your own practice, possibly concluding about approaches you might adopt or reject.

Another approach is to identify writing and discussion threads concerned with techniques or topics that intrigue you, and might relate to issues looked at in A363 materials. For instance, you might want to focus primarily on speech patterns, as taught in the drama section of the module. Make sure that your description of the work under discussion and your explanation of the relevant issues are clear, and that they will make sense to a reader of your critique who hasn't seen the original discussion

Wherever relevant, explicitly relate the discussion in your critique to A363 materials – chapters from the Handbook, tracks from the CDs, website items or clips from the DVD. Look for discussion threads where the debate may still be alive and unresolved, or where your interest is still engaged. If you look at more than one piece of work and discussion thread, try to establish a link between them in your critique. Why do these particular pieces of work or lines of discussion interest you? After offering an explanation and analysis of the issues involved, discuss how this may tie in with any of your future or past writing projects. The relevance of this editorial analysis to your own writing should always be kept in mind.

Writers' aims

The critique is not just a theoretical essay, but involves close editorial scrutiny – you are trying to identify a writer's aims and how well those aims are being achieved; and you are examining the development of a piece of writing.

When claiming to know a writer's aims and intentions, ensure that you establish how you know this. Has the writer discussed this on the forum? If so, show evidence, reference it and even quote him or her. Does this knowledge of the author's aims just arise from your estimation of the work? If so, you should give reasons for your estimation, point to the text and possibly illustrate with quotes. Don't assume that there is a common perception of the writer's aims.

Structure

Structure your critique so that you introduce your main points before going on to expand on them. Make sure you provide enough concise exposition of the work under discussion and the main discussion points, before entering into detailed analysis. But ensure such exposition is brief in comparison to the analysis. Only include relevant, not extraneous elements. Draw together the threads of your discussion, the common elements and points of divergence, at the end of your critique. Make sure that the significance/relevance of the discussion topics for your own writing is clear.

This can form part of your introduction – why do you want to examine these matters? It can also form part of your conclusion – are there any implications from this analysis for your own writing practice?

Sample critiques

Here is the beginning of an invented critique:

This critique will focus on one piece of work – the start of a short story called ‘The Fiorentina’, posted by Helen Page on 5 May 2008. This story arose from an activity in Chapter 5 in the Handbook. It started off as a monologue, a character-development piece connected with diners at a restaurant. The writer declared that the character wasn’t part of her TMA 02 work and would not find a place in her adaptation, but the voice haunted her. It was a woman’s voice and resurfaced on the forum as the first-person narrator in ‘The Fiorentina’. For several readers the voice was energetic in its first incarnation as an exercise, but for many of the same readers the voice in the story was objectionable or ‘too much’. It was as if the voice was bearable for just a scene but for no longer. Such commentators said that they could not read such an unsympathetic character over a sustained narrative; they had to feel ‘some link’ with the person who was telling a story and couldn’t with this woman.

I disagreed and thought the voice was strong and engaging in both the monologue and the fiction. For example, I liked the way in which the character spoke of herself as exercising restraint in her eating habits as compared with the other diners who were greedier and less sophisticated, tearing at their bread and leaving their lips smeared with grease. In my opinion these unkind thoughts brought the character convincingly to life. I found that I agreed with what Andrew O’Hagan says in Reading 26 in the Handbook:

There’s a horrible fallacy that exists in the popular discussion of fiction these days: the idea that a successful central character need be ‘likeable’ or ‘sympathetic’. It is surely more important that they be human.

(O’Hagan in Neale, 2009, p. 370)

I was intrigued by the thought of writing a story which had an unsympathetic narrator. I examined my own reading habits and found that some of my favourite narrators were fairly unpleasant. The character in question changed through redrafting, as a result of the comments. She became milder, using less harsh language, and for me she became less interesting. Her new mildness came with the use of a different lexicon but also a more conciliatory manner. I think the story lost something – or at least became a different story – by changing the voice of the narrator.

Here is an extract from towards the end of another invented critique, about two different pieces of writing – a stage drama and an autobiographical episode.

The fact that there is barely any dialogue in the stage scene is, I think, its primary strength, contrary to my first opinion of it and what some comments have suggested. I believe the lack of information draws the audience in, creates interest and mystery rather than confusion.

Initially I didn't think it was 'bare' or 'purposefully obscure', as some described it, though if I'm honest, I was baffled on first reading. Only on the second or third reading, and after listening to those readers who thought the script successful, did I begin to see the way in which it was working – drawing the audience in to imagine the dynamic between the characters.

Jane: Do you think he likes me?

Marie: Pass the bottle.

Jane: Do you really think so?

Marie: Can I finish this off?

Now I see it as aptly concise, revealing character traits without stating them explicitly.

By contrast 'A Day at the Beach' offers too much information, and information of the wrong calibre. It gives page-long descriptions of each character as they arrive, and while I think this is all admirably remembered and researched, and gives a clear indication of the era, it seems to lack what I can only describe as a 'personal touch'. This is ironic in a piece of autobiographical writing, but the characters seem as though they aren't yet alive. I would have liked to have heard a few lines of dialogue that weren't functional, and which didn't give me such plentiful information. As a reader some of the dialogue made me feel redundant. Lines such as – 'I've been married twice since we last met and am unhappy a lot of the time' – leave nothing to invent or imagine.

This issue is crucial to my own writing because I am only coming to realise that a well-researched and well-imagined piece of writing can sometimes be too effective in presenting information to its reader. Mark Ravenhill (2008) suggests that exposition is not really a problem, once you have got the character thinking and acting on his or her desires. This strikes me as very relevant to what has been creaking and causing problems in my own short stories. It is important not to overburden your narrative and dialogue with exposition. Alan Ayckbourn (2008) suggests that it is really a case of trusting your character, and then trusting your actors and your audience to understand what is going on. That is the principle by which Mary's stage scene appears to operate. I think this can be true with life writing and fiction too. I am only now learning to trust my reader. I think if 'A Day at the Beach' had practised dramatic economy, and trusted its reader, it could have been far more effective.

References

- Ayckbourn, A. (2008) Interview, A363 CD1 *Writing Plays*, Track 4, OU/Pier Productions.
- Jones, M. (2007) 'experiment – a stage scene', Drama Activities sub-forum, A363 tutor group forum, 30 November.
- Ravenhill, M. (2008) Interview, A363 CD1 *Writing Plays*, Track 5, OU/Pier Productions.
- Smith, S. (2007) 'A Day at the Beach', Workshop sub-forum, A363 tutor group forum, 10 October.

Here is a critique about a short story and its adaptation for stage, written by a past student of A363 for this TMA (used with permission and anonymised; the reference list is omitted). While it is strong in some respects, it needs more references to A363 materials and offers almost no reflection back on the critique writer's own writing practice at the end.

This critique will focus primarily on the short story 'Whatever Happened to Big Vaughan', written by HL and posted to the online forum for A363 Advanced Creative Writing on [date].

This critique will also comment on the adaptation of this story for stage which was posted on the same forum on [date]. The original short story was written by HL to use as his submission for TMA 01, which asked for a 1500-word stand-alone story. At this stage in the module our studies were focused on 'ways of writing' and included work on genre and using conflict and contrast to create drama. I began my critique by looking for examples of these elements being included in HL's prose. A clear sense of conflict is evident from the beginning, with the story's opening passage being a verbal confrontation between two characters. HL uses this conversation to plunge the reader into the action early on; this is a positive move, as it grabs the reader's attention.

Unfortunately the opening passage is quite difficult to follow, however, because the dialogue is not clearly laid out. This was a point also picked up by ST, who commented, 'I was initially confused about who was important, or who was speaking' (ST, 2016). I would suggest that the best way to combat this would be to include some simple clarifications before or after each line, such as 'Jim said' and 'Vaughan replied' – such signposts not only allow the reader to identify who is speaking, they also give the prose a structure which can be used to lead the reader through the scene.

Another element of the story I felt needed work was the vocabulary HL used: some of the word choices made the piece a bit difficult to really get into. HL uses an obscure simile very early on in the piece, writing: 'Vaughan looked around the bar as though he was Nureyev'. I have to confess that I had no idea who, or what, a Nureyev

was. A quick Google told me he was a famous ballet dancer, so while I could see where HL was going, I found it far too obscure a reference to justify the simile. AR agreed with me, warning against using such images unless you have ‘already established the context to your reader’ (AR, 2016). While I accept that different writers will have different ideas of what is universal (perhaps AR and I are in the minority of people who are ignorant of Nureyev), I think such a specific reference would have been better placed further into the narrative, after the reader has had a chance to form a clearer idea of Vaughan as a character.

Having received these comments, HL redrafted the story and posted an updated version to the forum on [date]. Immediately one could see the improvement in the opening exchange, with HL having implemented simple dialogue signposts to help the reader identify who was speaking. ST agreed that the opening was improved, commenting, ‘I am more clear on who is speaking now’ (ST, 2017).

Also missing from the redraft was the obscure Nureyev reference, and the piece benefited from clearer, simpler language throughout. I’m reminded of the advice quoted by Neale from Sir Arthur Quiller Crouch to ‘murder your darlings’ (Neale, 2009, p. 37). This refers to the act of removing overly lavish writing in favour of simpler language. No doubt HL was fond enough of his simile to include it in his first draft, but he was commendably strong enough to remove it on reflection.

For TMA 02, HL adapted his short story for stage and posted a draft of the script on the forum on [date]. The play is a direct adaptation, retaining the original storyline and cast from the short story. My first reaction to the stage play was positive. The confusing dialogue issues which hampered the prose immediately benefited from the rigid format of a script. I found myself enjoying the drama and felt the dialogue was more at ease in this setting. In the original short story, HL’s dialogue jarred against the sometimes overly complicated exposition surrounding it. But in the stage adaptation, the dialogue is free from these constraints and stands on its own, really showing off HL’s ability to write convincing dialogue. This was an opinion echoed by TA, who commented that ‘the characters’ speech is realistic’ (TA, 2017), while BM observed that ‘their conversation was easy to follow’ (BM, 2017).

HL posted his final version of the stage play on [date]. The finished piece showed good dramatic understanding, establishing a conflict between Clyde and Vaughan which was later reversed, following the reveal of who Clyde’s daughter was. The play followed a successful arc, building the tension gradually before a satisfying and dramatic climax, with the final line delivered by Jim putting a full stop on the whole affair.

A minor critique would be that, given the significance of the lighter to the play’s climax, it would have benefited from having a presence earlier in the play. Perhaps it could have been tied into the Ranulph Fiennes frostbite conversation – Clyde is not worried about frostbite as he had a heat source, or something to that effect. However,

overall I thought the use of the lighter as both a prop and a plot device was a clever and effective way to bring a physical element to the story.

The most impressive thing for me to see across the various versions of the short story and play was HL's clear improvement as a writer. He was brave enough to post his work online, something I have yet to do. More importantly, HL has responded positively to the feedback he received, which is not only a testament to his character but also shows the value and effectiveness of constructive criticism from one's fellow students.

Word count – 973

TMA 04 guidance

The instructions for this assignment can be found under ‘Assessment resources’ on the A363 website.

There are many ways of creating and developing ideas suggested throughout the A363 Handbook and CDs. In developing the idea for your EMA you should also be aware of the first four chapters in the A215 Workbook, which introduce ways of generating new ideas and suggest ways of using your writer’s notebook to develop projects.

Check the guidance about planning your assignments earlier in this booklet, especially the advice about separate ideas, prior learning and non-permitted genres.

One of the major choices at this stage will be committing to a genre – and in the case of drama, committing to a medium. Try to make the decisions about genre and medium as soon as possible and ensure that the idea you develop is suited to the genre and, if appropriate, to the medium you have chosen. You should keep to this decision through TMA 06 and your EMA.

Tutor advice

When commenting upon the proposal, your tutor may give you advice about the potential of the idea, how suitable it is for the genre you have chosen, and about its potential strengths and any possible pitfalls. Your tutor will also give you firm advice in response to this assignment about whether your idea is viable in terms of the instructions for this TMA and the instruction for the EMA. He or she may possibly recommend that you don’t proceed with an idea. Reasons for such a recommendation might include:

- a proposal that is slapdash and poorly thought out;
- an inappropriate choice of genre or subject matter: for example, children’s literature; journalism; a religious or political tract;
- a proposal that is too flimsy in scope for the required word count and module level.

If this happens, it doesn't mean that you have failed this TMA, but your tutor will need to advise you further and you will need to agree a course of action with him or her.

In such a situation, it is imperative that you are receptive to your tutor's advice; otherwise you risk losing marks for TMA 06 and your EMA project, or even, in the worse case scenario, failing the module as a consequence.

Of course, this doesn't mean you have to follow your tutor's advice to the letter and write to order what he or she suggests. The idea for your EMA project is yours, not your tutor's. But if your tutor gives you a serious warning about losing marks because your proposal is not viable, then it is up to you to take action about this. If your tutor is positive in his or her feedback on your proposal, this doesn't mean that good marks for your future work on this idea (in TMA 06 and the EMA) are guaranteed. It just means that your tutor judges the idea, at this stage of its development, to be viable. It is up to you to ensure that work on the project develops appropriately for future assessments.

Why write a proposal

This assignment is designed to help start preparations for your EMA. Staging the progress of a longer piece of writing – through the production of a proposal and first draft, completing the work during a period of independent study – is a common feature of creative writing study at this level. It helps you first of all to commit to an idea and then to develop that idea. The EMA gives you the opportunity to write a more substantial piece of work than in the TMAs, one which may be longer than any you have previously written.

It is important that you choose an idea that you can stay with and one which stimulates you. You should not change the essential idea as you proceed from TMA 04 through TMA 06 to the EMA. Obviously you will be able to alter and adjust it in whatever way is necessary to develop the idea, but your tutor needs to be able to trace the link between your final EMA project and this original proposal. It is important that the idea captivates you because you will be working on it for a considerable amount of time. This is another feature of creative writing study at this level – staying with an idea which is more substantial in terms of size and quality, rather than flitting between smaller and less well-achieved projects. Your writing should be liberated by this restriction. Here is what a student said of the assignment:

I have found it useful to tie myself to the mast with TMA 04 ... to come up with an EMA idea that I cannot get out [of]. Otherwise, come the time, I can see myself saying 'Will I do this idea or this or this?' Tying myself down over 'the big idea' means I can now focus on that idea.

However, as my tutor rightly said, the important thing is make sure that your idea 'excites' you. And yes, my idea excites me. And that's as good a starting point as I could wish for.

What to include

Listening to the CD interviews where writers explain how they have developed particular works will give you ideas about how to write your proposal.

Some of your ideas will be sketchy at this stage but you should be as precise as possible. For example, ‘I intend to write a radio play showing the horror of war’ should evolve into something more concrete, such as: ‘My main character will be an idealistic squaddie who gets worn down and compromised by what he witnesses in Iraq.’ You will find that a premise like this will rapidly start building into a bigger picture. ‘His company includes mates sympathetic to him and others who are irritated by him and even fear that he might let them down.’ This will lead you to ask: ‘Who are they?’ and so on.

Some details will inevitably change as your plan grows in your imagination and through your research. Your project will also evolve and change during the writing process. These kinds of development are expected but what you cannot change is the basic project once it has in effect been approved by your tutor.

Example

Here is an example of a fiction proposal. You will notice that it is quite detailed but it also leaves all kinds of options open at this stage: choices of method are flexible but you should show where your current thinking is about major issues.

My plan is to write a short story about a group of Polish migrants who have come to England to work on farms in East Anglia. The idea was inspired by a television documentary I watched, *The Poles Are Coming!* There is a moment in that programme where an interviewer is questioning a car driver who lives in an area ‘saturated’ with Polish families. At first it seems as if the man is ranting in a racist way about the degradation of his district:

‘Oh, the graffiti, the fly-tipping; the crime ... You daren’t go out at night ...’

‘And you blame the Poles for this?’

‘No, I’m talking about us Brits. The Poles are hardworking, look after their children, they’re polite – good luck to them.’

This is a paraphrase but such an overturning of the predicted reaction was refreshing, and I would like my story to contain moments like that. There might be a problem with doing that too much or in a way that’s too pre-programmed but I hope to avoid this pitfall by making my characters rounded and beyond stereotype.

There will be four Polish characters, who didn't know each other before arrival in England. They will form a kind of surrogate family, helping each other get to grips with a new country and to cope with hard work. So far I don't have a detailed sense of characters but **Marek** will be a 'father-figure' to the group. He is middle-aged, a person of old-fashioned rectitude, but who is worldly as well. He doesn't expect others to be abstemious and upright. He is homesick and smokes incessantly.

Marina is twenty-two years old, a graduate who feels mortified by the menial work she has to do, yet is also grateful to have it. She saves as much money as possible. She recites poems to herself while picking butternut squashes for ten hours a day.

Lena is also young. She is infatuated with English shops and goods, places and houses. She is infatuated with Marina too – this will be a 'romantic' ingredient.

Rudi is a former soldier, proud of his physique and endurance. His English is almost fluent and he finds himself in the position of negotiator between employers and workers. He is a natural 'top dog' and can be manipulative. He is permanently tired because he's a frequenter of nightclubs where he flirts with women who buy him drinks, so that he can avoid spending too much money.

I have not fully decided yet on narrative point of view. I would like to try a third-person shifting point of view, giving each character equal weight, but four is a lot to manage in a short story. I may opt for one narrator in a limited omniscient third person, either Marek as 'father' of the group or Rudi as the most fluent and the one who mixes most with other people.

At the moment, I'm unsure of the story arc and outcome but hope that the dynamic between these four characters and their interactions with neighbours, employers, new friends, will generate a crux for the story. I think that the characters may unite as a group in order to overcome some difficulty.

One of my problems will be in rendering each character's speech: making their voices different and conveying in each case an English that is limited in varying degrees. As the group will sometimes speak Polish to one another, I will need to use a smattering of Polish expressions. I intend to look at how some novelists have done this. Rose Tremain and Marina Lewycka both have Polish immigrants in relatively recent novels. I don't want to read these books in full, however, in case they would pre-empt the directions my own story might take.

I have visited the Fens area and will use it as one of my settings, contrasting that flat 'empty' space with the overcrowded city and house where my characters spend their scant 'leisure' time. Other researches will be into Polish food, which my local supermarkets stock; and into the experience of hard physical labour. I will read *Granta 89* ('The Factory') for comparable types of work and reread Robert Frost's poem 'After

'Apple Picking', which describes the aftermath of the kind of farm work my characters will do.

References

- Neale, D. (ed.) *A Creative Writing Handbook*, Milton Keynes/London, A & C Black in association with The Open University.
- Lewycka, M. (2008 [2007]) *Two Caravans*, London, Penguin.
- Tremain, R. (2007) *The Road Home*, London, Chatto & Windus.

TMA 05 guidance

The instructions for this assignment can be found under 'Assessment resources' on the A363 website.

Note that your idea for this TMA has to be completely different from TMAs 01, 02, 04, 06 and your EMA. You can't use the same scenario or set of ideas and characters for these different projects.

Check the section on planning your TMAs earlier in this booklet, especially the advice about prior learning and about non-permitted genres.

Fiction

If you choose to write a short story, make sure that its subject matter is appropriate to the length of the assignment (2500 words). The examples and extracts given in the Handbook should help you here. Some of them exceed the length allowed in this TMA, but even they restrict the number of characters, the location, and the time in which the story is set. Editing your fiction so that it cuts, splices and condenses action is essential to its success.

You should also consider the many techniques explored in Part 3 of the Handbook. Look back at Chapters 10 and 11 and their discussion of the influence of film and drama on writing, and the use of structure, montage and juxtaposition. Be cautious about using too many narrative strands in what is a relatively brief narrative. Splicing strands is a device often used in novels but you have to be judicious about using such a device in short stories. Check the advice on p. 167 in the Handbook. Think back to the discussion of narrative voice in Chapter 12, and the discussions of rhetoric, analogy, time and theme in Chapters 13, 14, 16 and 17. You will also find it helpful to refer to the EMA checklist later in this booklet.

Make sure that what you write is both clear and engaging. At every point in the story, you need to be thinking about what tactics you are using to keep your readers with you. When you are redrafting your short story, ask yourself continuously whether what you include is necessary. At the same time, guard against obscurity.

Consider starting *in medias res* – in the middle of the action – and think hard before committing yourself to any backstory. Listening to the writers

on CD2 and CD3, and looking at the clips on the DVD, will help you. Remember also that a short story does not have to resolve every aspect of the plot. The strength of a short story should come from its use of character and conflict.

Whenever and wherever your story is set, the detail must be convincing. You need to have done some research, even if the story is contemporary.

Make sure to read what you have written aloud, to check for appropriate rhythm and fluency. Consider your use of repetition and analogy (if any) and make sure such use is consistent with the story content and the style and voice in which it is written.

Follow the layout and presentation guidance for prose given earlier in this booklet.

Poetry

If you choose this option, your poems should explore the potential of the forms discussed in Chapter 15 of the Handbook: the villanelle, the pantoum, the sestina, the sonnet.

You may limit yourself to one of the forms (for instance, you could submit two sestinas), or you may submit examples of two, three or all four forms. It is up to you whether you choose a conventional or more experimental version of any of these forms, although your decision here should not be arbitrary, and will need to be explained in the commentary. The subjects of each poem may be entirely different, or, if you prefer, you may link two or all of the poems.

To remind you about respective length,

- a villanelle is 19 lines;
- a pantoum uses 4-line stanzas, but can be of any length;
- a sestina is 39 lines;
- a sonnet is traditionally 14 lines.

You could therefore (for instance) present any of the following:

- six or seven sonnets (84 or 98 lines);
- two sestinas (78 lines);
- two sestinas and a sonnet (92 lines);
- a villanelle, a sestina, a sonnet and a pantoum of up to 28 lines (100 lines). There are many other possible variations.

Please put a line count under **each** poem, and a **total** line count at the end. Epigraphs, footnotes, titles or sub-titles are not part of the line count.

Writing in received forms, or experimental versions of them, is not simply a question of being accurate about length. You should bear in mind the advice given in the Handbook and on the CDs about the use of interesting and dramatic language; the use of analogy; the power of repetition; and the need

for economy. There are several poems in the Handbook and some on CD3 which may help you to find an appropriate form for what you write. All of them use repetition of some kind, whether of phrasing, sound, image or form.

Your poems may be based on experience or imagination, or a mixture of the two. Bear in mind the guidance given in the Handbook about the kinds of subject which are appropriate to the chosen forms. Note that the use of rhyme is not mandatory in any of the forms, except the villanelle (and there are even examples of unrhymed villanelles). If you do use rhyme, try to do so subtly, such as via half or slant rhyme. Be wary of rhymes which chime in an unintentionally absurd manner. A poem which uses exact and simple end-stopped rhymes and a very pronounced beat may sometimes lead to an unintentionally comic or childish effect. Avoid using archaic language and inverting your syntax artificially. Also, unless you have a convincing reason, it is unwise to write in a series of very short lines.

A good poem needs to have a clear focus. It should avoid abstractions and any lengthy exposition or explanation. These forms are not made for ‘telling a story’; it is best to see each of your poems as an exploration of a particular incident, subject, insight or theme. Make sure to read what you have written aloud, to check for sound and rhythm, fluency and pace. Read the guidance notes for TMA 01 Option 2 – poetry, and the ‘Poetry and language’ section of the EMA notes later in this booklet; much of the poetic advice there will be relevant to this TMA.

Follow the layout and presentation guidance for poetry given earlier in this booklet.

Life writing

You may choose to write an autobiographical piece, or a biographical piece, or a piece which blurs the distinctions between the two. For instance, you may choose to write about someone you know, which will involve providing the reader with a sense of yourself as well as a sense of your subject.

As with the short story option, make sure that you don’t try to do too much in the space allocated (2500 words). Read the advice given above about constructing a piece of fiction. Everything in it applies to life writing. Use the chapters in Part 3 of the Handbook to make the most of structure, voice and style.

If your life writing uses fictional devices and methods, to the point of making it almost indiscernible from fiction, make sure that you discuss this blurring of generic boundaries in your commentary.

If you are writing a biographical sketch of someone you do not know, make sure that you do not attempt a ‘brief life’, that is, a summary of their entire life. A biographical sketch of 2500 words should only deal with a handful of selected incidents and focus on a short time-frame. For example, you might choose to write your piece as a sequence of short glimpses, or as two or three longer, more detailed scenes.

Make sure you read what you have written aloud, to see whether it has an appropriate rhythm and fluency.

Follow the layout and presentation guidance for prose given earlier in this booklet for your life writing.

Commentary

Remember to focus on revealing the creative process involved in your work. You are not asked to evaluate what you have done, but to explain the decisions you have taken. Quote concisely from your writing and your reading, where relevant, in order to back up your statements. You should support your points with appropriate reference to the Handbook, in particular to Part 3. You might consider referring to the influence of film and drama on your writing, or to write about your use of voice, style, language, rhythm, structure, time and form, as appropriate.

If choosing the poetry option, write one complete, continuous commentary which covers all of your poems, not a series of super-short individual commentaries about each poem.

For your commentary, follow the layout guidance for prose given earlier in this booklet.

TMA 06 guidance

The instructions for this assignment can be found under ‘Assessment resources’ on the A363 website.

This TMA has to be related to the proposal you wrote for TMA 04; it can’t be a completely new idea – unless your tutor has advised a major change.

While your tutor will need to see the link between TMA 04, the first draft writing in TMA 06 and the final version of the project in your EMA, this shouldn’t inhibit the development of your work. You will be able to cut, augment, edit and redraft in the normal way through all phases of the writing. Your tutor will be receptive to the need to make changes and will be fully aware of how work develops over time. On the other hand, something of the central idea needs to remain intact; your tutor needs to be able to trace the changes and recognise the link between TMA 04, TMA 06 and the EMA.

In most circumstances, a substantial amount of TMA 06 will be represented in the EMA project. But it doesn’t have to remain exactly the same – for instance, you may want to make changes in response to your tutor’s feedback. You are not restricted in the amount of editorial work you may wish to do on your first draft TMA 06 work.

Note that your tutor will mark this TMA as work in progress and will treat it as first draft writing rather than a completed final draft. However, you should still edit your work and make sure that it has structural coherence. Also, make sure you follow the presentation and layout guidance appropriate to genre and medium.

You can choose to draft the opening part of your EMA project for this TMA, if you wish, but you do not have to. You may prefer instead to write a key scene from some other point your story, script or piece of life writing,

or a couple of poems belonging to a sequence but not necessarily the opening ones. However, if you are writing the opening chapters of a novel for your EMA, your TMA 06 has to be part of those opening chapters.

Refer to the EMA notes later in this booklet relevant to your chosen genre and medium. Also refer to the notes for TMAs 02 and 05 depending on your genre, and the TMA 02 section in the Study Guide (pp. 68–9). Even though this is a first draft, you are required to use the appropriate layout for your chosen genre and medium, and to provide a brief cast list and set description where appropriate.

Commentary

Your commentary is the place where you can explain the changes you have had to make to the original proposal – such as detail elements that have been added, refined or cut. This will enable your tutor to see the links between the two assignments and establish that you are still working on the same idea.

It is important that you address any crucial areas of your tutor's TMA 04 feedback in your commentary, especially feedback which suggested radical change. Explain changes you have or haven't undertaken in reaction to tutor feedback, and give reasons. You won't lose marks for arguing with and sometimes resisting critical tutor comments; you might lose marks for ignoring them completely. You should also link your discussion with elements of A363 materials, wherever relevant.

If choosing the poetry option, write one complete, continuous commentary which covers all of your poems, not a series of super-short individual commentaries about each poem.

If choosing the script option – writing for stage, radio or film – include a structural plan as part of your revised synopsis. Do not submit storyboards. You may use the format of a step outline or scenario as illustrated in the Handbook, but you will probably have to submit extracts or an abbreviated form of one of these, because you need to fulfil the other requirements of the commentary.

Your revised plan constitutes part of the total word count for the commentary and should be 100–175 words in length. You will lose marks if you fail to include it (up to 3 marks penalty) or if all of your commentary is taken up with your revised plan (up to 7 marks penalty).

Here is an example of a commentary, which indicates how the proposal shown as a model in the TMA 04 guidance notes has been developed.

For this TMA I have submitted a key scene featuring an argument between my four main characters. I have chosen this part of my story in order to demonstrate narrative point of view, setting, and action as well as a section of dialogue that shows how I'm differentiating the characters' voices.

I found a lot of information on my subject on the internet and a newspaper article by Felicity Lawrence (2005) was particularly

informative about the ways in which both EU and illegal workers are exploited by employment agencies and gang-masters. There is also the beginning of a legal crackdown on some of these unscrupulous employers, who are accused of supplying abhorrent accommodation and low wages. This research has given me the idea for my plot, which involves my group of characters confronting their gang-master's unfair practices. But first they will have a conflict among themselves about whether to 'keep their heads down'. One or two of the characters will be fearful of reprisals.

I experimented with using Marek, the middle-aged man, or Rudi, the more fluent ex-soldier, as my third-person character-narrator. I posted examples of both 'voices' on my tutor group forum and the feedback was divided. Some people liked Marek's maturity and wistful observations, while others found Rudi more vigorous and edgy. I have decided to make Marek my viewpoint narrator and will prevent his measured voice from lulling the reader to sleep by having lots of different scenes, dialogue and some humour. But there is still the possibility of using alternating viewpoints, which I would like advice on.

As my sense of my characters has deepened, plot and characters started to merge for me in exciting ways. I discovered that both men have strong contradictions. Marek appears gentle and compliant but is someone whose own father was a committed member of the Solidarity trade union movement in Gdansk in the late seventies. He is dismayed at the way he and his fellow workers are being treated and is prepared to challenge the gang-master. Rudi has an appearance of toughness and matter-of-fact bravery but is unexpectedly submissive. His experience as a soldier has led him to rely on his ability to endure things rather than to question or try to change them. The story will therefore involve a power struggle between these two men as well as the eventual clash with the gang-master.

In rendering various degrees of imperfect English, I am avoiding phonetic spellings or anything too obscure, as advised by my tutor in response to TMA 04. I have re-read the extract from Tanika Gupta's play *Sanctuary* in the Handbook, and am particularly impressed by the contrast in her characters' voices. As a consequence I am now relying on small lapses of grammar and occasional wrong words to signal each speaker's degree of fluency without giving readers problems of comprehension. From my research, it became obvious that groups of migrant workers often include people from many different countries: Ukraine, Lithuania, Afghanistan, China, Iraq, and so on. Therefore I need to mix up my Polish workers with others. They will still be my main characters and feel bonded with one another. It is this friendship as well as other uplifting things – romance, landscape, contact with home, some kindness from strangers – that will keep my story from being too downbeat. Despite the exploitation, I want to portray my characters as survivors, not victims.

References

Gupta, T. (2009) 'Sanctuary' in Neale, D. (ed) *A Creative Writing Handbook*, Milton Keynes/London, A & C Black in association with The Open University.

Lawrence, F. (2005) 'Polish workers lost in a strange land find work in UK does not pay', *Guardian*, 11 January.

EMA guidance

The instructions for the EMA can be found under 'Assessment resources' on the A363 website.

Your EMA has to be related to the proposal you wrote for TMA 04 and your first draft work in TMA 06; it can't be a completely new idea – unless major changes have been agreed with your tutor. However, this shouldn't inhibit your redrafting and development of the work. Your tutor will be fully aware of how writing develops over time.

In most circumstances, a substantial amount of your TMA 06 will be present in your EMA project. But this component may have changed considerably. You are not restricted in the amount of work you are able to do in developing your EMA.

Remember – your idea for your EMA project has to be completely different from TMAs 01, 02 and 05. You can't use the same scenario or set of ideas and characters for this EMA project.

You must state clearly at the top of your submission which option you have chosen (i.e. short story, the opening of a novel, a sequence of poems, life writing, stage play, radio play, or film script).

Fiction

If you choose to submit a short story, you should attempt to demonstrate that you can create a complete, satisfying narrative within the given word limit.

Think carefully if you prefer to submit the opening of a novel. This is not a form that is directly taught on A363. Selecting this option will require you to demonstrate different skills from the ability to create a complete short story, and many students who select this option do not end up executing it to a successful standard.

If submitting the opening chapter(s) of a novel, do not include a prologue. If submitting more than one chapter, they must be consecutive. You should also provide a brief accompanying note of not more than 100 words to indicate the way the plot might proceed. This note is not included in the word count for your chapter(s) and it will not be assessed. Its purpose is to provide your examiners with some context for your the opening chapter(s). If you omit this note, the examiners may be unaware of significant details

they need to know about characters, setting and structure, and you risk losing marks.

For the opening chapter(s) of a novel, you will need to create a convincing beginning of a longer narrative and make your readers want to know more. At the same time, be careful not to try to pack everything in. You may know how the story turns out, but you need only establish what is necessary for the start of your story.

Just as with the short story option, the examiners will be assessing your ability to control the elements of a story, such as structure. Your opening chapter(s) should be structurally coherent in itself/themselves, using some of the approaches advocated in the module. Whether you choose to write a story or the opening chapter(s) of a novel, you should aim for an appropriate balance of showing and telling in your work; be wary of any excessive reliance on summary, explanation, backstory, generalisation or abstraction.

Choose your narrative point(s) of view carefully. If you select a third-person viewpoint, make sure you understand the difference between a third-person limited perspective and full omniscience. A limited point of view is told from the perspective of one character and remains close to that character. If you choose full omniscience, it is important to resist straying randomly into every character's consciousness and slipping into extensive summary.

You will also need to decide whether to use one or more points of view, bearing in mind the 4000-word limit.

Take care to demonstrate some of the elements of style learned during A363: rhetorical devices such as analogy or metaphor; the influence of film or drama techniques in your arrangement of scenes, the use of time or splicing of strands.

You should also weigh up carefully all your decisions about the basic aspects of fiction writing as you draft and revise your work: character, plot, point of view, description, dialogue, setting, pace, language and theme. The following checklist is not comprehensive but will help you to evaluate your work and revise it where necessary.

- Are the characters sufficiently complex?
- Are the characters different enough from each other?
- Does the main character grow or change?
- Is the plot interesting? Is a good story being told?
- Does the story move forward? Does the tension increase?
- Are any parts of the plot superfluous? Are any necessary parts missing?
- Does the point of view seem right for the story (first person, third person, and so on)?
- Is the point of view consistent throughout the story?
- Is there too much or too little description?
- Do the descriptions utilise the senses? Are they specific?

- Are adjectives or adverbs overused? Are the nouns and verbs strong enough?
- Are any metaphors or similes used? Do they work?
- Is there too much dialogue or not enough?
- Does the dialogue sound natural?
- Does the dialogue reflect the characters?
- Is the dialogue too obvious – with characters always saying exactly what they mean, or simply used for exposition?
- Is the story grounded enough in place? In time?
- Does the setting enhance the mood or atmosphere of the story?
- Are there sections that should be cut, or moved through more quickly?
- Are there parts that should be slowed down?
- Are there too many flashbacks?
- Does the narrator's voice sound natural or contrived?
- Is the voice consistent throughout the story?
- Are the sentences and paragraphs too long or too short? Are they varied and rhythmic?
- Is the writing too wordy or too spare?
- Are there any style choices that could distract the reader from the story?
- Does there seem to be a point to the story?
- Is the theme too heavy-handed?
- Is the theme dramatised or enacted by the plot?

Poetry

Follow the layout and presentation guidance for poetry given earlier in this booklet.

Epigraphs, footnotes, titles or subtitles are not part of the line count.

Sequence

The choice of subject for the sequence is up to you.

Think carefully about your strengths as a poet, and the examples of sequences given in the Handbook. You are free to write in a received form or forms or in free verse, as you like. If you mix the styles, you must justify such a choice in your commentary. Your poems might all be of the same length (for instance, a sonnet sequence of ten or eleven sonnets), but they might be quite different in length; any combination is permissible. It is not advisable to submit a large number of very short poems.

Writing a sequence means that there needs to be a relationship between your poems. There are many ways in which you might link them. You might choose to consider a subject or theme from a number of different

angles, or in a number of different voices or your poems may be linked by form or imagery.

It is also important to consider the order in which your poems are presented. A sequence can gain strength by possessing a sense of development. You might choose to unfold an idea over the course of a sequence in order to reveal a certain theme. Or, your poems might be linked by the second echoing the first, the third echoing the second, and so on.

However, a sequence is most effective when the links between the poems are implicit rather than explicit, subtle rather than heavy-handed. Leave your reader work to do. Let the reader find the relationship between the poems, rather than providing the relationship for the reader. There are examples of poems from sequences, and references to other sequences, in Chapter 17 of the Handbook.

You must give your sequence one overall title. If you choose, you can give each poem in your sequence an individual title as well, although this isn't mandatory.

Poetry and language

Successful poems are likely to use some interesting or even startling turns of phrase, or to use inventive combinations of vocabulary. A poem which is able to describe an environment or feeling or action with an original choice of adjective, noun, verb or adverb is likely to arrest the reader. At the same time, be careful not to overdo the language to the extent that it clogs the poem. Make your reader do some work, but don't challenge the reader with words at every turn. If your poems contain too many self-conscious polysyllabic words, they may well seem confused or overwritten.

Equally, a simple poem, using no interesting turns of phrase, is likely to be dull. Poetry gives you a chance to play a little with language. If your language is flat and reductive, so will your poem be. A poem which is practically monosyllabic is unlikely to make for interesting reading.

Archaic language (contractions like *o'er*; old forms like *thy, methinks*; words like *bedecked, vale, drear, wend, pent, eve, wondrous* and so on) should be avoided – they will clash with the contemporary vocabulary you should be using. Of course, the context of a word will determine whether or not it is archaic – a word like (say) *pallor* could work, depending on the poem's voice.

Think about word order. Does the order sound natural? Are you changing the word order to make a rhyme work? An unnatural construction like *To the beach went he* is likely to be caused by trying to rhyme with (for instance) *sea* in another line. Avoid inverting your word order unless you have a very good reason to.

Try to keep the tone natural and conversational, whether the poem is rhymed or unrhymed. There is of course no such thing as 'correct' rhythm, but if the rhythm is awkward or jagged, there should be a good reason for it.

Think about how you use line and stanza breaks in poems. Stanza breaks (that is, dividing a poem into stanzas) are not compulsory, but it is worth

asking yourself if the poem would improve with a little more white space. Pausing to let the reader in can be a good idea.

See if you can avoid abstractions, such as *anger, pain, determination, heart, loneliness*. They are likely to be a form of shorthand – of telling rather than showing. They are also empty and dull, sapping your work of the vivid particularity that brings a poem to life.

You should aim to have a particular and well-defined focus in each poem. A poem about, or derived from, an incident or observation is going to work much better than a poem attempting to approach a colossal subject in a small space. Don't try to do too much in a fairly short poem.

Ending a poem does not necessarily mean finishing on a punchline. Bring the poem to a close in some way, but leave the reader something to think about. It's always worth going back to a poem and asking if you've unwittingly ended the poem more than once – that is, will the ending be stronger if you cut the last three lines?

Here are some key questions to ask yourself:

- Have you shown the technical range of which you are capable in your use of imagery, voice, structure, metre and rhyme or free verse?
- Is your poetry free of commonplace or hackneyed images? Have you used unnecessary abstractions? Have you used unnecessary inversions?
- Are the objects and emotions in your poem(s) described precisely, with clear details, and not overloading with too many adjectives?
- Does your poetry suit its chosen length, or could it do with editing?
- Does your poetry work when you read it aloud?
- Does your poetry hold the reader by using devices such as repetition, metaphor or simile? Does any term or word need explaining further, and if so, does it require a footnote?
- Does what you have written contain a degree of development in its central idea(s)?

Refer to the relevant chapters (in both the A363 Handbook and the A215 Workbook), and to the guidance notes for TMA 01 Option 2 - Poetry in this booklet, to review further specific advice on poetry writing.

Life writing

You are asked to write a complete passage of life writing in prose. A 'complete passage' means a piece of writing which can stand alone, one in which there is a sense of structure. Your passage can be biographical or autobiographical, or a mixture of the two, and the subject of your life writing is yours to choose. It could be a piece of travel writing which focuses on the person or persons at the centre of the story you have to tell. A travelogue which focuses principally on describing place, or has the quality of a journalistic guide, would not be appropriate.

This does not mean that place is unimportant in life writing. A sense of the environment in which your writing occurs is crucial, as are realistic

dialogue, analogy, voice, character and point of view. It would be acceptable to use more than one point of view, as it would be acceptable to write the piece in sections. Think about the advice given in the Handbook about the influence of film and drama on narrative.

Make sure that you think about a balance of showing and telling – avoid turning your life writing into something that reads like a historical essay.

Whether your life writing is contemporary or set, in whole or part, in a different time, you should make sure that you have done the appropriate research – so that the details in your passage do not jar.

As the passage is only 4000 words long, make sure that you do not try to cover too much territory. Whether your subject is autobiographical or biographical, you are not being asked to compose a ‘potted life story’ or cover an entire lifespan. You should focus on an incident or incidents which illuminate the person(s) about whom you are writing, and carefully restrict your time-frame. Read the advice given in Chapter 16 of the Handbook about the use of time.

Do not use a point of view which is inanimate or non-human. Although there are historical examples of this the results are often twee. Your life writing must clearly be by a human being, about a human being or human beings, past or present.

Stage, radio and film

The techniques relevant for each medium can be found in Part 2 of the Handbook. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are devoted to stage, Chapter 7 to radio, Chapters 8 and 9 to film. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 also cover many general dramatic principles. These principles and methods – for instance, to do with dialogue, dramatic action, status and exposition – can be applied to film and radio as well as to stage writing. Also, the section on dramatic monologues in Chapter 12 is of relevance, as are CDs 1 and 2.

Your choice of medium should be unambiguous; the script you produce cannot be for more than one medium. You cannot, for instance, say ‘This could be for radio or stage.’

Your script should have a title. Whatever medium you choose, you should provide a cast list, with brief character descriptions – these should be just a few words, one line maximum. If you choose film, your script can be for the big screen or for television, but you should designate which when giving your title and cast list.

Use the appropriate layout for your chosen medium. Layout guidance for stage is given in Chapter 4 of the Handbook, for radio in Chapter 7 and for film in Chapter 8. You will also need to structure your script using scenes. In film you will have to give a heading for each scene (see Chapter 8 of the Handbook). With radio and stage there is a choice as to whether you number and title your scenes, though the shape and direction of them should always be apparent from their content (see Reading 14 in the Handbook, *The Homecoming*, by Harold Pinter, for an example of a script without scene number or title, but where there is the clear structural shape of a scene).

As this is a larger script than the one you wrote for TMA 02, you will be able to include more scenes. There is a greater likelihood that you will have a subplot as well as a main plot. You should make the relationship between main plot and subplot a symbiotic one. This is discussed in Chapter 9 of the Handbook, but some of the discussion of theme and making connections in Chapter 17 will also be relevant to this.

When writing and redrafting your script you should be aware that the director and actors will eventually interpret it. On one level the script has to work as a set of instructions; on another level it has to work as an invitation for others to use their imaginations. Make sure that the audience is not given too much information but that the basic points of the story you are telling can be understood. Check the proportions of your story: for instance, are your main characters and peripheral characters given appropriate amounts of performance time? Think of the contrasts in your script – between voices and between characters. Think also about the conflict between and within your characters. This is crucial in a longer script, where you will have to ensure momentum is maintained and where conflict can be more complex and developed than in briefer scripts.

You will need to establish how and when to juxtapose different scenes if writing for film and radio, and how to establish links between them. If writing for stage, establish a set and imagine a preferred stage for the performance. The checklist for TMA 02 in this booklet and the checklist at the end of Week 11 in the Study Guide will be useful aids as you draft and redraft your script. Remember to read your lines aloud, to make sure they work as spoken dialogue.

Ensure that the media-specific elements that help tell the story – the physical and visual narrative, sound effects, juxtaposed scenes, linking devices, sets and props – are all clear and concise in your script. Remember that script involves an economical form of writing. Leave space in the script for the performers to interpret – but make sure all the basic elements of the story are in place.

Adaptations of work produced for the TMAs on this module, or previous modules at the OU or other institutions, are not permitted.

Reflective commentary

Your commentary should refer to the choices you have made in writing this final piece of work, as well as weighing up an overall sense of your development as a writer during the course of the module. This should be written as one coherent piece which reflects on the effects the module has had on your writing, and on this particular piece of work.

You should refer to any major draft revisions or to entries in your writer's notebook as evidence of this process. You may quote from these sources to help reinforce any point you are making. You may also include mention of relevant feedback from your tutor or forum group. You should reflect, for instance, on the dialogue you have had with your tutor as the work has progressed through TMA 04, the proposal stage, and TMA 06, the first-draft stage. Wherever possible relate your writing practice to A363 materials. Indicate any elements that have been influential in the way you have

approached your EMA project – for instance, parts of the Handbook, tracks from the CDs, clips from the DVD or items from the website. Refer to any research or outside reading undertaken for your EMA project.

If writing poetry, do not write a separate commentary for each poem. For further guidance, see ‘Writing a commentary’ earlier in this booklet.

Points to remember

- **Submission of the EMA is compulsory in order to complete and pass the module.**
- You are required to submit both parts of the EMA: 80 per cent of the marks are allocated to your creative writings in the chosen form and 20 per cent to your reflective commentary;
- Your EMA project relates directly to formative work done in TMA 04, which you developed further in TMA 06;
- You may not submit material already assessed in TMA 01, 02 or 05, even if substantially revised;
- Take great care with your presentation as marks may be deducted for poor presentation;
- You must state clearly at the top of your submission which option you have chosen.

EMA feedback

Throughout the module you receive detailed feedback on your TMAs from your tutor – this feedback is developmental, that is, designed to enhance your understanding and progress. You have also received formative feedback on your EMA project. Due to the tight timescale for assessing the EMA, it is not possible to supply the same kind of detailed feedback. Instead, markers are asked to complete a tick-box form, scoring various key elements of each student’s performance. This form will provide you with some basic feedback to indicate the strengths and weaker areas in your creative writing and commentary and give you a way of interpreting your final marks.

Markers are asked to look at seven feedback criteria, five of which refer to the creative writing component of your EMA project. The last two refer to the commentary. The categories are necessarily broad as they have to accommodate fiction, poetry, life writing and script. You will receive one feedback breakdown for your creative writing, and one for your commentary.

Remember that the feedback on the creative writing and on the commentary is basic and impressionistic, that is, giving an overall impression of attainment in particular aspects of your EMA performance. Please note that there is no strict relationship between various configurations of ticked criteria and particular mathematical scores. All the criteria are important, but they are not equal. For instance, presentation will attract fewer marks than language and structure.

Here are some descriptions of what markers are looking for in each category:

Creative writing

Language

This refers both to the clarity and precision of language and to its creative use: analogies, conciseness, stylistic subtlety, use of repetition, silences and rhetorical devices. It also refers to the appropriate and consistent use of language in a particular circumstance – writing stage, sound and action directions succinctly in a script, for instance.

Voice

Voice is not completely separate from language. It refers to the creation and sustaining of an authorial style, which might be developed through a range of methods, including impersonation, idiom, point of view, dialogue or observation. It also refers to the way you gauge the rhythm and pace of your writing in poetry, in prose, and in scripts. With the latter two genres, this category also includes the range, depth and subtlety of characterisation, and the use of dialogue in character creation and development.

Structure

This refers to the effective organisation of the writing. In fiction, it might mean a balance of showing and telling or an appropriate and proportional development of a story arc or plot. It can also mean handling time effectively in your fiction and using dramatic methods such as scenes, intercut narrative strands and differing points of view. In poetry, it might mean an ability to deploy a given form such as the sonnet or villanelle, or the deployment of an appropriate structure or pace of elements in free verse. In stage, radio and film it might mean how scenes are structured and how well the dramatic action is working in those small sections but also in the overall story.

Ideas

This refers to the content or theme of a piece of writing. The idea might be to write a story in a particular genre or to create a subtle parallel between plot and subplot. It might be to write a biography from the point of view of a protagonist's rival or to write a poem incorporating textng language. Ideas are assessed on their originality but also on how well the writing establishes a setting, and the ideas fit that setting, the characters and the form. Ideas are also assessed on how well they have been researched and developed, and on the level of subtlety and sophistication apparent in the way the ideas find expression in your work.

Presentation

This refers to correct spelling and grammar as well as to sound editing and appropriate professional layout of prose and poetry. In some cases a writer may deliberately use non-standard English or break the rules of grammar and spelling to create a particular dialect. Those cases will be assessed on the basis of whether such use of language is used consistently and whether it fits the context. In stage, radio and film scripts, the presentation category refers to the effectiveness and appropriateness of the script layout for a particular medium. With prose and poetry, the presentation category refers

to how clearly the work is laid out and how well it follows the guidelines contained in this booklet.

Commentary

Analysis

This refers to the quality of discussion in the commentary. Markers will look for evidence of your ability to think critically about your writing and editing processes. Commentaries should also reveal your ability to gain and reflect on techniques and methods from your reading. The analysis part of the grade also covers how well you have reflected on and responded to feedback on your work.

Presentation

Commentaries will also be assessed for the clarity and accuracy of their presentation, including any appropriate referencing and bibliographies.

Assessment scale

This module uses the 100-point marking scale set out below. Your tutor will award a mark between 0 and 100 for each of the TMAs that you submit and this will be notified to you as a grade on the PT3 form.

The information that follows is intended to give you an idea of the general qualities that will influence your tutor in deciding the grades for your TMAs. These guidelines can only be indicative of the requirements for achieving a particular grade; the grade you receive will reflect above all how you have responded to the demands of a specific TMA. The same guidelines will be applied by EMA script markers, and your overall performance standard for the module will depend on your work for both the TMAs and the EMA.

In creative writing, there cannot be a rigid template or checklist of criteria but we can give broad outlines of the kinds of qualities we will look for:

- a strong feeling for words, including different tones, weights and registers. Clarity and precision of language. Appreciation of pace and rhythm. Vivid or unusual imagery. Lively phrasing. Avoidance of cliché, hackneyed phrases, generalised abstraction;
- the ability to realise characters, settings and events, bringing them to life convincingly;
- structural awareness – the ability to shape and pace a piece of writing effectively, using time, scenes and formal constraints;
- awareness and control of voice and viewpoint; ability to sustain a consistent tone or range of tones, where appropriate;
- professional presentation, including correct spelling, grammar and syntax;
- correct formal layout, including demonstration of technical expertise in poetry, understanding of appropriate paragraphing in prose texts and media-specific formats in drama scripts;
- sound revision and editing.

Writing improves with practice and with the acquisition of techniques. You will see that the marks for TMA 01, for instance, make up just 15 per cent of your continuous assessment mark, whereas TMA 05 makes up 40 per cent. This is a Level 3 module and prior learning is essential. The first TMA comes after only three weeks of teaching and will help the tutor gauge your level of prior learning.

Most of the TMAs that require original writing (that is, TMAs 01, 02, 05 and 06) also require an accompanying commentary describing the processes involved in the making of the piece of writing. Instructions about this are given in detail with the full requirements for each TMA. You are required to submit both parts of these TMAs: 80 per cent of the marks are allocated to the creative writing and 20 per cent to the commentary.

There are two TMAs that do not require a commentary:

- TMA 03, where you will write a critique of the work of your fellow students that has been posted on the tutor group forum;
- TMA 04, where you will write your EMA proposal.

In the first two tables below there are descriptions of the qualities to be found in the creative writing and the commentaries in each grade band. Inevitably, there will sometimes be mismatches between the levels of accomplishment in the two parts of a TMA: an excellent piece of writing might be accompanied by a slapdash commentary; a satisfactory piece of writing might have an incisive and illuminating commentary. In these cases, the mark for the commentary will have the effect of pulling up or down the overall mark.

Following these is a third table which provides band descriptions for critiques. This table is only relevant to TMA 03.

Creative writing

85–100% (68–80 marks)	Assignments in this category will be outstanding and show potential for publication or performance. There will be a sense of a distinctive writer's 'voice' emerging. The writing will show a combination of strong imagination and technical sophistication and control. Tone, style and structure will be exemplary. There will be some degree of originality in the subject matter or approach; an idea will have been rigorously researched and/or imaginatively developed. The language will be alive and supple; character development and awareness of genre and medium will be excellent. The level of achievement will be sustained throughout. These assignments will be astutely edited and professionally presented in terms of layout and correct grammar, punctuation and spelling.
70–84% (56–67 marks)	These assignments will show a great deal of fluency and technical expertise. They will be a 'good read' or offer promise in performance, but the overall piece of writing may be less consistent or fully achieved; the ideas behind it will show considerable research and/or imaginative development, though this might not be complete. Character development and awareness of genre and medium will be very good; the use of language will show some flair and clarity but may falter sometimes. Good editing and redrafting practice will be in evidence. The assignments will be well presented with correct layout and a high level of accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

55–69% (44–55 marks)	These assignments will be competently conceived and written, showing a grasp of relevant A363 material, but they may be somewhat unoriginal or underdeveloped. There may be gaps, omissions or implausible elements; the idea might lack research and/or imaginative development. The language may sometimes be striking, but sometimes also stale or unfocused. Some editing will have been undertaken though this may not be complete. Character development and awareness of genre and medium will be in evidence but may be inconsistent; there will be some evidence of research and/or the imaginative development of an idea. Presentation will attain a general good standard, with some inconsistencies.
40–54% (32–43 marks)	Assignments in this band may show some attempts at using the suggested methods, but there will be too many gaps and confusions. Language and/or structure may be muddled; character development and awareness of genre and medium will be lacking; the idea will be in need of research and/or imaginative development. Some editing may be in evidence, though parts may be seriously overwritten or underdeveloped. Presentation will be variable, inaccurate at times in layout or in basic grammar, punctuation and spelling.
30–39% (24–31 marks)	There may be some evidence of familiarity with the A363 materials but quite a lot of confusion and misunderstanding, and few coherent attempts at using the suggested methods. There will be little character development or awareness of genre and medium; the idea will be in need of research and/or imaginative development. Many parts of the writing will be in need of redrafting and editing; presentation will be inconsistent.
15–29% (12–23 marks)	These assignments contain a negligible understanding of A363 materials. Rather, there will be a predominant incoherence and confusion in the presentation and layout, and barely any evidence of editing, redrafting or that the suggested methods have been tried. Presentation will be poor. The writers of these assignments may have misunderstood the rubric for the TMA but the writing may have some commendable elements.
0–14% (0–11 marks)	Complete or nearly complete misunderstanding of the A363 materials and little or no use of the suggested methods. Presentation will be poor. These assignments may not have followed the rubric of the assignment.

Commentaries

85–100% (17–20 marks)	The commentaries in this band will be lucid and insightful, giving a clear sense of the evolution of the piece of writing. They will deftly weave commentary with supporting evidence from the writer's notebook and/or from tutor or peer feedback, as well as displaying a clear and sophisticated understanding of A363 materials, further reading and technical ideas and vocabulary, while appropriately referencing any illustration.
Excellent	

70–84% (14–16 marks)	Good Pass	The commentaries here will be astute, describing the creative process in an interesting and relevant way. They will reflect the writer's strong engagement with the piece of writing, as well as an earnest and often clear engagement with the ideas and methods suggested in the module. They will often use appropriate language and illustration in the discussion of the writing.
55–69% (11–13 marks)	Clear Pass	The commentaries in this band will be thorough and satisfactory. They may sometimes show awareness of flaws in the piece of writing or they may defend and explain the writer's decisions well. But their engagement with A363 materials and use of terms and vocabulary introduced during the module may be flawed.
40–54% (8–10 marks)	Bare Pass	The commentaries here will be superficial, attending to minor details of phrasing or plot, for example, rather than larger elements such as structure or tone. These commentaries will lack the necessary level of analysis shown in the higher bands, though there may be some fleeting engagement with the creative process, and they may use technical vocabulary but in the wrong context.
30–39% (6–7 marks)	Fail	Commentaries in this band will show a lack of coherence about the aims of a piece of writing, as well as revealing a poor engagement with A363 materials and a serious lack of analysis and comprehension of key terms, as well as inappropriate use of such terms.
15–29% (3–5 marks)	Fail	Commentaries in this band will be scant and lacking in insight: they may be underlength, incomplete and not fully engaged with either the piece of writing under discussion or the relevant technical issues of the module.
0–14% (0–2 marks)	Fail	Commentaries in this band will be negligible and very poor in quality; some might not even be recognisable as commentaries.

Critiques (TMA 03 only)

85–100%
Excellent (marks are as per %)

Critiques in this band will contain complex analysis of method, form, genre, medium and approach. The exposition of the work and related discussion will be exemplary in its clarity; there will be original, engaged and insightful examination of the issues, with excellent reflection back on the critique-writer's own practice. This will reveal a committed engagement with the writing process. The critiques will deftly weave explanation, debate and supporting evidence, quoting aptly from the forum, creative works, A363 materials and other sources as appropriate, revealing a sophisticated understanding of A363 materials, technical vocabulary and ideas, methods and approaches, while referencing accurately and proportionately. There will be a strong, objective yet personal writing style which uses appropriate language for this form of writing; presentation will be excellent.

70–84%	Good Pass	Critiques in this band will offer astute analysis of method, form, genre, medium and approach. The exposition of the work and related discussion will be clear; there will be engaged and insightful examination of the issues, with good reflection back on the critique-writer's own practice. There will be debate and supporting evidence, with some apt illustration from the forum, creative works and A363 materials. This will reveal a strong engagement with the process of writing. There will be a good understanding of A363 materials, technical vocabulary and ideas, methods and approaches. There will be some referencing, though there may be inconsistencies here. They will use appropriate language for this form of writing; presentation will be very good.
55–69%	Clear Pass	Critiques in this band will offer satisfactory analysis of method, form, genre, medium and approach. The exposition of the work and related discussion will be clear – though some will omit examination of the related discussion or conversely just examine issues without relating this to specific works. There will be some reflection back on the critique-writer's own practice but this might be imbalanced – there might be too much of the critique-writer's own opinion or method; there might be too little analysis; there might not be enough analysis of the appropriate issues. There will be some supporting evidence, but with a need for more illustration. There will be an understanding of A363 materials but it will be flawed. There will be some referencing, though there may be inconsistencies – either an absence or too many references in proportion to the amount of analysis. There may be moments when the appropriate language for this form of writing is attained; presentation will have inconsistencies.
40–54%	Bare Pass	The critiques in this band will be superficial. They will just list and explain the work and related discussion without the appropriate level of analysis and engagement. They will occasionally omit the related discussion. The reflection back on the critique-writer's own practice will be negligible. There will be no supporting evidence and there will be flaws in the understanding of A363 materials. There may be some fleeting engagement with a writing issue or use of technical vocabulary but the latter might be in the wrong context. There will be no referencing and the style will use inappropriate language for this form of writing; presentation will be poor, including spelling, grammar and layout errors.

30–39%		Critiques in this band will show a lack of coherence about their approach to the assignment, as well as revealing a poor engagement with A363 materials and a serious lack of analysis and comprehension of key terms, as well as inappropriate use of such terms.
15–29%		Critiques in this band will be scant and lacking in any meaningful discussion: they may be underlength, incomplete and not fully engaged with either the forum postings under discussion or the relevant technical issues. They may have misinterpreted the rubric for the assignment and written about one or more pieces of their own writing and just their own forum postings.
0–14%		Critiques in this band will be negligible and very poor in quality; some might not even be recognisable as critiques.
	Fail	